HUNTING IN THE GOLDEN DAYS



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HUNTING

IN THE

GOLDEN DAYS

BY

HUBERT GARLE.

ILLUSTRATED.

BY

FINCH MASON.

London:
F. V. WHITE & Co., 14, Bedford Street, W.C.
1896.

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TO

COLONEL A. P. F. C. SOMERSET, C.B.,

ENFIELD COURT,

IN GRATITUDE FOR VERY MANY PLEASANT GALLOPS

ENJOYED WITH HIS

UNRIVALLED PACK OF STAGHOUNDS,

THIS LITTLE BOOK, BY HIS KIND PERMISSION,

IS INSCRIBED BY THE AUTHOR.

PREFACE.

I HAVE an old and battered silver wine funnel in my possession, which belonged to my forefathers, who were all ardent fox-hunters. Many a time have I thought what tales it could tell if it could only speak, for it has, doubtless, been present at many a hunting dinner in the days of yore, when people were more particular about the condition of port than they are nowadays. The thoughts it conjures up in my mind are of a very pleasant nature, and to it is attributed the conception of this little work.


LONDON
PRINTERS
HAZELL, WATSON & VINEY, LD
AND
BUNGAY
AYLESBURY



THE STIRRUP CUP.

CHAPTER I.

MR. GOODBERY is standing with his back to the fire, the tails of his well-worn red coat thrown over his arms. Above him hangs a portrait of Peter Goodbery, his father, who lived in Foxley Grange before him and hunted the Foxley Harriers to the day of his death. The present Mr. Goodbery is one of the old school, and the sporting instincts of the father have been inherited by the son. It is natural, therefore, that it should be our hero's favourite pursuit to follow the hounds.

Mr. Goodbery is a stout gentleman of comfortable means, and still more comfortable appearance. To be exact, his income is £2,500 per annum, derived chiefly from land. He troubles himself little about business matters, and has a dread of married life, as he has seen so many of his companions, jolly good fellows when single, become rather sober and thoughtful after entering the lists; consequently, he is rather apt to shy off the fair sex. Although he has been talked to by his married friends and recommended to follow suit, he always thinks they are like the fox who lost his brush, and so he means to keep clear himself.

Foxley Grange is a charming place, with its many gables and picturesque windows peeping out through the ivy and westeria. The old house dates back to early in the sixteenth century, and is built partly of brick and stone—a roomy house with an old-

world air pervading it. The gardens, laid out in the Dutch style, still bear signs of their original grandeur, although they are now somewhat neglected. No doubt Court ladies have graced the walks with their presence, for the villagers speak with veneration of the quality that once resided within its hospitable portals. The shape of the beds recalls my lady's flower garden, and a broken sun-dial covered with lichen and an old stone seat bearing unmistakable signs of "anno domini" help to arouse pleasant memories of by-gone days.

On entering the house, the first thing that claims attention is a magnificent oak staircase, made so wide and strong that no doubt the architect built it with a view of allowing enterprising horsemen to ride up to bed on horse-back, which was a favourite amusement in the olden days, so 'tis said. The hall is laid with good stone flags; opposite the door is a generous fireplace, where a couple of large logs blaze on the andirons and make things cheerful at Christmas time—for our forefathers did a good deal of entertaining in their halls, where the young folk could make as much noise as they liked, without disturbing the old people over the cards and negus.

Then what cellars there are under that house! Enough room to stow away a regiment of soldiers; but put to better account than that, for our ancestors were a very independent set, and liked to be their own factors. There are innumerable cupboards, rooms and recesses, used for pickling, baking, brewing, and the storage of apples and cheeses, also a large vault-shaped room well stocked with wine, for it is a very necessary thing to have ample room for laying down port, as three-bottle men like their wine to be old and crusted. The kitchen is well worth a visit, its quaint ingle-nook and hearth

giving an air of home and comfort to the house. Down the chimney hangs a series of pot hooks, where the iron saucepan is suspended that contains pot-luck for the hungry hunter. From a beam across the ceiling there dangles a row of fine hams in canvas bags, which Mrs. Stores, the housekeeper, has cured at home, for has she not the chimney where all that appertains to the mystery of bacon curing is conducted? What a comfortable old settle, too, with a high back that keeps off draughts and makes things cosy. This is the seat frequented by the gamekeeper or groom, who, after a long day with their master across country or through the turnips, may enjoy a meal there by invitation. All these things were part and parcel of country house life when agriculture was in a more prosperous state than in the present day, and landlords were able to live on rents received from their farms.

The reception rooms of the Grange are not exactly spacious, but there is plenty of room for the dispensation of English hospitality, and a charming suspicion of former times still lingers about them, recalling the days of hair powder, high heels, and ruffles. Strange tales are told of mysterious noises heard in the corridors at dead of night—the rustle of silk gowns and jingle of spurs being described as some of them. An affrighted guest, who was on a visit to the Grange for a fortnight, hearing these sounds, packed his box at break of day, vowing that important business compelled him to return to town at once. Mr. Goodbery, however, has never heard any of these noises, although he has lived in the house all his life, and he attributed them to the cold pork and pickles his friend had been eating for supper. No doubt, once in bed, Goodbery sleeps too

soundly to hear anything, for a hard day's ride after hounds is conducive to peaceful slumber.

Of late years our host has been unable to walk quite as well as he could wish whilst shooting, and so has had recourse, good sportsman that he is, to a shooting cob, "for," says Goodbery, "17 stone for Shanks's pony is a good deal to carry." When shooting one day, being mounted as usual, and coming across some heavy land that lay on the side of a steep hill, he called on his fellow sportsmen to keep up in line, forgetting that he was mounted and they on foot. The poor fellows did their level best to keep the line with him, upon which he remarked, with a wicked twinkle in his eye, "I say, you fellows, this makes you huff and puff a bit, don't it? Come on, my lads, keep in line! keep in line!" But to our tale.

Mr. Goodbery is going hunting to-day. Not that this is an unusual event in his life, for he takes the field about four days a week. This morning he is expecting Oldwig, a hunting friend, to call for him on the way to covert, and on looking out of the window he sees that worthy riding up the drive on his hunter. Goodbery is blessed with a coachman who is always on the spot when wanted, and of course is there to hold the stirrup whilst the guest dismounts, should he so desire.

"Welcome," exclaims the hearty host in a joyous voice, "and let me give you something, for the weather looks somewhat threatening and you know the old maxim, 'He who would the dart of death defy, should keep the inside wet, the outside dry.'" With these words he produces two large silver tankards, bearing by their dents probable evidence that they have been used at an earlier date in settlement of some difference of opinion.



"MR. GOODBERY IN PURSUIT OF THE PARTRIDGE."

These he causes to be filled with good nut-brown ale, for Goodbery believes in moderation early in the morning, and never drinks anything stronger than ale before dinner.

Oldwig remarks that they have no time to waste, and must be moving if they do not wish to be late; so wishing themelves good luck, they are soon on their way to the meet. Our hero mounts by the aid of a horse-block, for he is no feather-weight, as we have already hinted. Oldwig sometimes jocularly remarks to his friends, "What does it matter to a man like Goodbery if he weighs more than any one else in the hunt? He's got good hands and judgment, a long purse, and to my mind, his weight rather tends to steady his horses at their fences than otherwise."

As they jog along to the meet they fall in with several other sporting people, all bound in the same direction. Amongst them is Miss Richmond, mounted on a white Arab and escorted by a negro servant in a gorgeous livery and riding a similar animal.

"Good morning, Miss," says Oldwig, raising his hat. "Glad to see you are going to honour the hunt to-day with your presence." At which Miss Richmond smiles and says nothing.

"Might your father be coming out this morning?" ventures Goodbery.

"Yes, papa is coming; in fact, here he comes," as an old-fashioned gentleman, mounted on a sporting-looking chestnut, turns the corner.

"Talk of angels, sure to see them," says Oldwig. "Good morning to you, Richmond. How are you?"

"Well, not quite as well as I might be; rather a heavy dinner last night at the Green Dragon, where they proposed the Master's health too often. But no doubt a

gallop after a good straight-necked fox will soon put me right. Anyway, Oldwig, I shall look to you to give me a lead to-day, as my nerves are a little shaken, and I know you never let them get far away."

Now, if there is one thing that Oldwig likes more than another it is a little soft solder. As a matter of fact, be it whispered, our friend is a bit of a funker, and a deal better across country after dinner, when the wine has been freely circulated, than at any other time. But this is only a detail.

By this time they have arrived at the meet, the rendezvous being an old-fashioned manor house, snugly nestling amongst high elm trees. The rooks, flying high, are quite in a commotion to-day, as they are unaccustomed to seeing so many red coats about, and fear for their safety.

The hounds are in a meadow in front of the house, surrounded by a group of admiring bumpkins. The majority of the sportsmen are partaking of breakfast. Let us follow Goodbery and Oldwig, who have just dismounted and are about to enter the house. Within all is bustle and excitement. The kindly host, with beaming face, is cutting away at a great side of beef, assisted by half-a-dozen laughing maids who are further augmented by a couple of red-waistcoated servants (doubtless procured from the stable), for the strain on the establishment requires all the power available.

"How are you, Goodbery, my boy? Take a seat next to me," shouts the host, with the voice of one who is accustomed to speak to people out of doors. "Come, what will you take—rabbit-pie with forced-meat balls, cold chicken and tongue, pigeon-pie, or a bit of that loin of pork, fed on the premises, it's rare stuff to stick to your ribs, my lad."

Our friends do full justice to the meal, for it must be remembered that hunting in the time of which I am writing was different from the sport of to-day. In those days the fox was sometimes started before sunrise, and hunted till sundown, when the jovial huntsmen returned to their dinner, which they made the principal meal of the day.

Several farmers come in and are welcomed in the same boisterous manner, and after all have satisfied the inner man they mount their hunters again and take the field.

There is a good field to-day and a large attendance of regular followers.

What sport, I ask, is there to be equalled to that of fox-hunting, with its healthy exercise, change of scene, sociability, and excitement? Was it not Lord Palmerston who said the finest thing for the inside of a man was the outside of a horse? Personally, I don't think he was far wrong. I don't want to be sour, but very different is the hunting of the present day of which some young men think so much, from the sport of our grandfathers, in the days when railways were unheard of, and every face was known at a meet. Nowadays many people go out for the sake of pace and jumping fences rather than for love of the good old sport of fox-hunting. How many of our modern sportsmen know the name of one hound from another, or which are most reliable or throw their tongue in cover?

Imagine yourself living at the early part of the century, when our forefathers set out at daybreak with their friends and neighbouring squires, having heard of damage done to hen roosts; they would unkennel their hounds and try to get on the drag of the old fox, and slowly hunt up to where he was sleeping off the effects of

his midnight feast. What hound work! What music from those old-fashioned, deep-throated packs! The huntsmen knew every hound and cheered them on by their names; many long runs they had, and surely it was better sport than running into a fox after twenty minutes, as with present day hounds, for very few foxes nowadays will stand up before them longer if there is a scent.

Talking about long runs reminds me of one that took place in 1793. Here it is, taken from a good old journal:—

"On the 11th January last an old dog fox was found in Perrin Wood in the County of Kent, by T. D. Brockman's hounds. He ran through the following parishes:—Postdene, Saltwood, Newington, Paddlesworth, Acrise, Limminge, Eltham, Denton, Barham, Kingstone, Bishopsbourne, Hard, and Bridge Street, forming a zig-zag of 32 miles, which was run in two hours and twenty-one minutes to the last-mentioned place, where the old dog fox was forced to surrender a life which he endeavoured to preserve by that strength and agility unequalled by his race."

Many of the packs in the early days were trencher fed, and on a hunting morning were collected by a man who went through the villages blowing a horn. I know an old man who still takes a keen interest in all matters connected with sport, although he has grown too old and feeble to do much himself. When a boy he managed to persuade his father, rather against the latter's will, to keep a hound. One morning, when working in the forge, the old dog, who was lying on the floor, heard the sound of the horn in the distance.

"Father," said the boy, "shall I let Trueman out?"

"You go on with your work," was the father's reply,



GOING TO THE MEET.

"and let the hound bide. It costs enough to fill his belly now without a' hunting."

Presently the horn sounded again, this time nearer. There was a crash and a sound of broken glass; the old hound had jumped through a lattice window.

"Blame it," said the father, "it would have been cheaper to let old Trueman a' gone a' hunting than a' kept him."

Yes, times were different then. We now hear of the golden farmer and wonder what sort of a man he could have been. An innkeeper at Bagshot changed the name of his sign from Golden Farmer to Jolly Farmer to make it more comprehensible to the uninitiated. In the days of which I am writing, wheat fetched £40 a load, and a farmer could afford to send his corn to market with a team of six horses with good harness and bells. I once remarked to a present-day farmer what a good old custom it was to have bells on the horses, and asked him why he did not have them on his teams.

"Why, lor, sir," he replied, "I wouldn't do it for something. If my landlord saw me doing that, he'd think I was making a fortune, and would raise my rent at once."

So much for his landlord!

But I am digressing from my story. The hounds are now in cover, their merry music proclaiming the pleasure the exercise affords them. Dr. Viles, an impatient little man, rides up on his flea-bitten grey, with a lean head and neck, and asks the Squire if he thinks they will find in this spinney. He does not wait for an answer, but rides off to another corner of the cover, and asks a similar question of another sportsman, and again rides off before an answer can be returned. But his

character is well known ; there is no harm in him, and most of his friends know that no answer is required. He is an open-hearted little man, and many of his patients have heard him speak against medicine, although it is his calling. "What you want," he would say, "is plenty of horse exercise and a little dieting. Don't take too much medicine ; it only wears out the stomach. When I first began to practise I used to be much fonder of prescribing draughts and pills than I am now. But as we grow older we grow wiser, and we begin to learn something when we get one leg in the grave."

By the silence in covert it is clear that there is a blank draw, so the hounds are taken off to Jobblin's Wood, about half a mile away. Here they are more fortunate, for almost as soon as they get into cover, they proclaim they have found their fox. Away tear the heavy weights, Goodbery and Oldwig included, for is it not half the battle to get well away ? Crack goes the top rail as a blundering three-year-old gives the timid ones a chance. The hounds are running very keen on a strong scent, and although the field are not mounted on such mettle as is to be found in the highflying country of Leicestershire, yet they are on good, useful horses, made, perhaps, more for endurance than pace, and most of them safe conveyances into the bargain. "When you get over forty, however sporting you may be," Goodbery is fond of saying, "the less falls you have the better, although in my time I have had my share, and more, too, for the matter of that."

Up comes our host of the Manor House, mounted on a cocktailed bay, that looks a hunter all over, and worthy of the noble-looking man who bestrides him.

"I think they are making for Tilling's Wood," says he; "let us get on, or we shall lose the best part of it."

They cross a magnificent park, where sheep are grazing amongst the fine oak trees. The hounds run close up to the mansion, as though Master Reynard had half a mind to stop and seek the kindly shelter of its portals. But no, away they stream across the grass, jump the park railings into the coach road to an open, breezy common, where they are at fault: but only for a moment, for hark! a leading hound owns to it. Jack, the huntsman, cheers them on, and they are again away in full cry. Goodbery, in moments like these, feels that he could stand up in his stirrups and shout at the top of his voice, so great is the pleasure and excitement of the chase. But no doubt had he done so, he would be taken for a lunatic, which, under the circumstances, would perhaps have been a reasonable verdict for any onlooker to have arrived at.

Crossing a few low-water meadows with a nice little brook, that heavy weights can all manage and chat over during their dinner, the sportsmen mount a steep hill. On arriving at the top, they find that the fox has run along the ridge till he has reached a large plantation, where he hopes to baffle his pursuers. The hounds, however, are bent on having his blood, they vow he shall die; but it is not all over yet, for having got his wind outside this plantation he makes another gallant bid for life by sinking the hill and crossing the country that lies below. Some heavy ploughs here have to be encountered which find out the weak places in the horses. Next comes a nice jump for a clever hunter, a bank with a ditch on the take-off and landing side, where a couple of horsemen bite the dust, but they are soon up again and seem more eager than ever to show it was only a

mistake, and that they could do much bigger things and not come to grief.

Some of these little doubles are very tricky and need some doing. There was a good old sporting farmer in Hertfordshire who had one constructed on his farm so as to be seen from his dining room. In this way he often managed to have some good sport when the hounds were running in his neighbourhood. There were always two or three riders caught in the trap if the fox led them over it; indeed, our friend was often heard to declare that it furnished quite a diversion for his wife and daughters, who might otherwise have found the country monotonous during the dull and dreary winter months.

Every run must have an end; after crossing a couple of ploughed fields, Master Reynard turns round and gallantly faces the pack who shortly demolish him. Jack, the huntsman, is soon dismounted and, holding the fox aloft, he performs the obsequies, surrounded by the baying pack.

CHAPTER II.

A FEW weeks after the foregoing events, Footit, the butler, enters the room and hands Mr. Goodbery, on an old silver salver, an important-looking envelope, bearing a large red seal with the crest of a mailed arm and sword. Letters, in those days, were greater rarities than in the present day, and Mr. Goodbery hastily opens the envelope, withdraws the contents, and reads as follows:—

"Buckskin Hall,

"December 17th, 17—.

"My dear Goodbery,—We are having our usual Christmas gathering this year on the 24th, and are looking forward to seeing you. No ceremony. You will meet with the same party as hitherto. Get here as early as you can, as you know we dine at five, and bring your appetite with you. All news till we meet.

"Your sincere old friend,

"JOHN JARVIS."

From this moment Mr. Goodbery is in a fever of excitement, and at once communicates the contents of the letter to Mrs. Stores, his housekeeper, who is busily engaged the whole day looking out suitable clothes for her master's visit to Buckskin Hall. The gold eye-glass and snuff-box, though not in general use, are produced for the occasion. "Who can tell,"

says Mrs. Stores, "but that there will be young bucks with whom he will have to contend, and it is as well to carry on these occasions as many guns as possible." Still it must be admitted at the same time that Mrs. Stores has a great horror of Goodbery's visits, for she well knows the traps laid by widows for wealthy bachelors, and has no liking for the idea of having a mistress to lord it over her where she has been in sole control for close on a quarter of a century. However, the necessary preparations are completed at last, and the family coach is ordered out for the occasion.

A grand old carriage it is, hung on a perch with ample hammer-cloth, with a strong flavour inside of must and moths, the coat-of-arms emblazoned on the panels, and a pistol-case behind as a warning to gentlemen of the road that weapons are carried in case of need. There are doubtless many good sportsmen in the present day who drive mail-phaetons hung upon a perch, but do not know the original cause of construction of that old-fashioned part of the vehicle. It was constructed for the purpose of keeping the pole from oscillating too freely and thereby damaging the right leg of the post-boy.

The coachman is dressed in his best livery, his flowing skirts, well-curled white wig, and flesh-coloured stockings giving an air of importance to the equipage. Everything is got ready in good time, for the pair of heavy shires, although they look capable of drawing a laden wagon, must go at their own pace, for the roads are heavy and the journey long.

Mr. Goodbery's trunk is safely strapped on the ponderous coach, his footmen mount behind, and the two good horses are at length fairly on their journey.

It is lovely weather for a trip of this kind, especially with so pleasant an object for its destination. Mr. Goodbery is pitched about like a parched pea on a drum, as the heavy carriage ploughs through the deep ruts.

They soon reach the summit of a hill, whence they command a view of the surrounding scenery. On the top of this hill is erected a gibbet, where the remains of a highwayman hang in chains, the creaking of the rusty iron making a mournful accompaniment to the whistling of the wind through the bare branches of the trees. Such spectacles as these are apt to detract from the beauty of the view, but they are put there with an object, and, doubtless, they have a salutary effect on many.

As they descend the hill the pace becomes brisker, and it is evident to Mr. Goodbery that the rate is becoming rather too furious. The stones rattle beneath the horses' feet, and the oscillation is so great that our hero finds himself bumping about on the floor of the carriage. Suddenly there is a tremendous lurch, the ponderous vehicle for a moment is balanced on two wheels, then, with a crash, it falls on its side, and throws our friend nearly through the front panels on to the coach-box. Luckily, the carriage is well padded inside, and Goodbery, who is unhurt, soon manages to crawl out through the open window. Unfortunately, however, he finds both his trusty horses down, and with their knees so badly cut and damaged, that the coachman, who has fortunately escaped uninjured, informs his master that they will be unable to proceed further, even if the coach is sufficiently sound to do so. The horses are led off to an adjoining farmstead, and a couple of others enlisted from the plough to take the

coach on the remainder of the journey. Subsequent progress is slow, but sure. Mr. Goodbery has to content himself with the reflection, that although it is very trying to have two horses disabled, matters would have been infinitely worse if the carriage had also been damaged, as in that case he would not have been able to continue his journey at all.

At last they reach their journey's end. Driving through the park gates, they proceed by way of a long avenue of trees up to the fine Elizabethan mansion, surrounded by a large area of park. The night is cold, and the lights gleaming from the windows make the scene a picturesque one. A light fall of snow during the latter part of their journey brings to mind very vividly the pleasures and comfort of those ensconced in so comfortable-looking an abode. Soon the front door is reached, the steps of the coach are let down with a clang, and Mr. Goodbery descends, and is welcomed into the hall by his good old friend, Sir John Jarvis, who congratulates him on being unhurt after his accident. A spacious and charming hall it is, with its panelled oak and carved cornices. A huge fire of logs is roaring up the ancient chimney, its bright light making the portraits stand out in bold relief on the walls, their beauty being enhanced by the holly and evergreen decorations that we associate so closely with Christmastide.

"Glad to see you. Had a very cold journey, I am afraid. Let's shut the door and keep out the cold. We will soon warm you up here," says the kindly host, taking his guest by the arm and leading him to the fire. "Don't trouble about your baggage, they will look after that, it will be sent up to your room."

Goodbery, indeed, finds it a pleasure to arrive in so comfortable a house after so cold and tedious a journey.

Several carriages now arrive with other guests, their advent causing quite a commotion. How well the postillions love to hear, when hired, that their destination is Buckskin Hall, for there they know they can rest their weary jades whilst regaling themselves on roast beef and ale to their hearts' content.

What pleasant memories do the post-boys recall in our minds. They were a breed distinctly of their own who never grew old, presumably because they were always called boys, and associated themselves as such. The amount they drank and the weather they encountered all tended to keep them hardy. Doubtless had they not led this open-air life they would have been boxed at a much earlier period, for many good men of better constitutions who drank less have succumbed to their potations owing, no doubt, to want of exercise. How neat they looked, too, when dismounted, enveloped in their smocks which were thrown over their gorgeous liveries to keep them clean, for at any hour of the day they were liable to be called at a moment's notice when the yard-bell rang, and the summons of "next pair out" was heard. I think it was Dickens who said that you never see either a dead post-boy or a donkey.

As Goodbery enters the hall a burst of merry laughter is heard, and a troop of young folks come swarming over the marble floor. Mr. Goodbery is overwhelmed with salutations, for it must be understood that he is a great favourite with the young folks, and is looked upon as an institution upon these occasions. As Sir John Jarvis truly says, it would not be Christmas without Goodbery.

As the dinner-hour has nearly arrived our friend is shown up to his room, where he removes his travel-stained

clothes and titivates himself up for the evening meal. His apartment is well worthy of notice. It is a lofty room hung with tapestry, with a delicate scent of lavender and dried rose-leaves pervading it. The large four-post bed with heavy draperies reminds one somewhat of the old bed of Ware. The whole effect is perhaps a trifle uncanny, with a suggestion of shadowy legends and ghosts. A portrait of a young lady hangs over the fireplace, which might perhaps bring up unpleasant visions to nervous minds, for it is a family legend that this beautiful creature of so fair and fragile appearance was foully murdered shortly before her wedding day. But Mr. Goodbery is fortunately endowed with strong nerves, and therefore the apparition is not likely to disturb his digestion nor cause him unpleasant qualms.

Half-an-hour later our hero issues forth arrayed in his white nankin breeches, black velvet coat and white wig. Descending to the drawing-room he finds a large party of guests assembled, and he is again cordially welcomed at this union by his old friends. Miss Janet, an elderly spinster, sister of Sir John, is looking her best to-night, and as she lays her slender hand for a moment in that of Mr. Goodbery, a thrill passes through her system, for she has hopes, which alas ! up to the present have been unfruitful, but she comforts herself with the reflection that there is no knowing what time may work.

She has known Mr. Goodbery ever since they were both children, and many are the pleasant gatherings at this festive season of the year at which they have met. She has tried many wiles to capture him, some might say without any response from that solid gentleman ; but we know the fair sex, when once bent upon any object,

seldom or never relinquish their efforts without having obtained the desired result.

"I am so sorry," says Miss Janet, "to hear of your breakdown on the road to-day, but I am glad to hear from my brother that you are none the worse for your escapade. Indeed, it would have been a sad thing if we had had to nurse you here during Christmas with, perchance, a broken limb, whilst the remainder of our guests were enjoying themselves below."

"You are, indeed, thoughtful," replied Goodbery, "to think so kindly of me, for, as you say, the pleasures of Christmas would have, indeed, evaporated had such a contingency as you name occurred."

"Had you not better," continued the thoughtful lady, "call in the assistance of our neighbouring apothecary, who is, indeed, a sage and learned man, and have yourself overlooked by him, for we know the adage, 'a stitch in time saves nine,' and it may reasonably be applied in your case."

"Indeed, Miss Janet," replied Goodbery, "it is no worse than many a fall I have had in the hunting field; for there oftentimes the plough is soft, and the well-padded sides of my coach offered the same kindly protection."

"You must then, at least, let me administer one of my cordial draughts, for though you look lightly on the matter, so serious a shock is oftentimes followed by a fever."

Goodbery, who has no idea of these nostrums, politely declines, assuring the lady that he is quite unhurt.

"Yes, but you must remember that you have had a narrow escape of your life, Mr. Goodbery, and you might be lying a corpse on your bed instead of sleeping in it to-night. Ah, life is a solemn reality, and it is as

well to keep before us as often as possible the thoughts of churchyards, worms, and graves."

"If you don't mind," said Goodbery, "I think I would rather talk of livelier subjects to-night; and, if you please, I'll take a glass of punch."

This dreary lady's conversation is interrupted by the entrance of the other guests. The first to enter the room is our old friend Oldwig, accompanied by his wife. Besides these are Mr. and Mrs. Richmond, and cheery, ruddy-faced Mr. Winebold and his spouse, all of whom are old friends of Goodbery's and regular visitors at Sir John's homely gatherings. Then, too, there are a couple of college chums, come down from Oxford to spend the Christmas "vac" with Eric, Sir John's eldest son.

Nor has the reader yet been introduced to Mr. and Mrs. Lofty. Mr. Lofty is a diminutive man, who boasts that he is able to ride under eight stone, and as he is a devoted follower of the chase his weight stands him in good stead. Although a bold man to hounds and never known to funk the stiffest bull-finch, yet in the presence of his wife he shows an entirely different front, for he has never been known to oppose his better half on the slightest subject. In fact, anyone glancing at Mrs. Lofty for a few moments could not but conclude that there is some good reason for the little man taking this course, as she is a powerful hard-visaged woman some ten years his senior, whose physiognomy denotes by its strength of character that she is not to be trifled with. Why he ever married this lady has been an enigma that many of his friends have tried in vain to solve. Some, however, are unkind enough to hint that he possibly married her for her money-bags.

Be that as it may, Mrs. Lofty has certainly gained the upper hand over her husband in all domestic matters, and she is not averse to showing her power over him. With an imperious voice she calls him to her side.

"George, have you seen that all the luggage is safely placed in our room, and have you carefully counted all the boxes?"

"Yes, my dear," replies the submissive husband, "I have attended to that."

"You had better make certain," replies his dame, "so go up at once and count them over again. You know what there is. My large hair trunk, my three hat boxes, my dressing and jewel case, your carpet bag, hat box, and brown paper parcel. You remember the last time we paid a visit to Foxholes you forgot my dressing-case, and you know how I was put about."

Lofty is about to leave the room, with alacrity, in quest of the said luggage, when he is again recalled by his loving wife.

"While you are up there, George, you might take out my moiré-antique, for you know how crumpled it will get if it is left in the packing."

At last poor George is allowed to go and get this distasteful business over, and while he is gone I will introduce the reader to another of the friends who have come to spend Christmas at Buckskin Hall.

One of the guests usually found in every country house, and who is, indeed, a most valuable addition to every social gathering, is Charley Yaverton. He was, at one time, in a regiment of horse, but being unfortunately possessed of small means, he was compelled to sell his commission, and now he is located at Buckskin Hall for several months each year, acting as

the Squire's confidant, writing his letters, keeping farm accounts, breaking in his dogs and horses, and generally making himself agreeable to his friends. In fact, he is one of those invaluable men without whom no country house seems to be complete.

Goodbery, who feels the pangs of hunger growing on him, as the jolting about of the coach and no lunch have given him a rare appetite, is not sorry when dinner is announced, and he is told off to take in a shy young maiden, a niece of Sir John's. What a merry party they are on this occasion, the flashing of the lights upon the old silver on the sideboard, the brightness of the cut glass and dishes all helping to make the comforts of life more pleasant and palatable for the guests assembled to enjoy them. Roast beef, mince pies, plum pudding, and old mulled ale are as usual in attendance to celebrate the season of the year. "Christmas comes but once a year," remarks Goodbery with a sigh of perfect happiness as he helps himself to another mince pie; "but when it comes it brings good cheer."

Miss Janet has arranged that she is to be seated on Mr. Goodbery's left. Artful spinster, she did not wish to be taken in by that worthy, in case it should cause comment, but at the same time she has contrived to be seated next to him, so that she may enjoy his conversation. As soon as the guests are all seated at table, Miss Betty, Sir John Jarvis's daughter, narrates an adventure she met with while returning from a visit to London, where she has been spending a few days with her sister.

Returning by the "Comet" coach, the passengers consisting only of Charley Yaverton, Miss Betty, and another lady, as evening drew near and they were crossing a wild common the coach was suddenly

brought to a standstill. At first they were unaware that anything unusual had happened, and thought that the guard had dismounted to put the skid on for the descent of a hill, or that one of the horses had fallen lame with a stone in its shoe; but surmises were at once set at rest on the point by the appearance at the coach doors of two highwaymen. They were both disguised with black masks and mounted on magnificent cattle. Many of these gentry had seen better times and knew what a horse ought to be, but had been driven to this mode of obtaining money as a last resource, through having lost their fortune over the throw of a dice or turn of a card. They were doubtless bold men, who carried their lives in their hands, for no one knew better than themselves the risk they ran of a bullet through their skins, and the tree at Tyburn as their finale.

Our two gentlemen opened the door of the carriage and politely requested the passengers to dismount, and to deliver up any valuables they had about them. Fortunately for Miss Betty, Charley Yaverton was in attendance, and this friend in need not only carried a brace of horse-pistols in his belt under his cloak, but was also endued with presence of mind. He began to parley with the ruffians, assuring them that none of the passengers in the coach carried any valuables. This their aggressors would not be satisfied with, and they were about to search the party, as Miss Betty explained it—forsooth, a most ungallant crew—when by a move of strategy Charley withdrew round the coach, and mounting to the seat which should have been occupied by the guard had not that worthy decamped at the first sign of danger, he fired the blunderbuss carried by the coach full in the face of one

of the villains. Unfortunately, it flashed in the pan, but quicker than thought he whipped out his pistols and discharged them at the already terrified highwaymen with good result, for it seems that one was so severely wounded in the shoulder that he was unable to mount his horse, and had to be assisted by his comrade. The two villains then made good their escape, followed for some distance by the military hero, who, however, was unable to overtake them. Charley then returned and gallantly handed the ladies into the coach, primed his pistols, and mounted the roof to act as bodyguard over them. The coach then proceeded on its journey and our friends arrived home without any further adventure.

Mr. Goodbery congratulates Betty on her fortunate escape, and relates an adventure of a similar nature that happened to him, but as far as he was personally concerned, of a less fortunate character. He was returning by coach across Hounslow Heath one dark winter's night, when progress was put a stop to by a resolute character, and though there were a goodly number of passengers, they were unfortunately without a weapon of any kind. The guard, perhaps being in league with this scoundrel, was not provided with firearms. The travellers were all turned out of the coach and told to stand and deliver. One passenger shot a handful of guineas into his boots, thinking thus to be able to conceal his wealth, but the highwayman, scenting concealment, demanded that he should pull them off, to which the poor wretch was obliged to accede, although with very bad grace.

"Having about fifty guineas with me," says Mr. Goodbery, "I handed them up without a murmur, as I well knew that if I refused, I should lose both my money *and* my life."

Another passenger, an actor, who had some money about him, luckily escaped with his hard-earned money, by feigning to be a lunatic. He danced about, and replied, "Nunkey pays for all" to the highwayman's request for money. The highwayman, not understanding this jargon, again ordered him sternly to hand over all he had, but the only reply he made was "Nunkey pays for all." A fellow actor, falling in with the plot, at once came forward and informed the highwayman that this man was his nephew, and that he was unfortunately deprived of his reason, and always kept on saying that his uncle paid for everything, as he, poor fellow, was never entrusted with any money. To keep the play up, the actor continued to dance and reiterate "Nunkey pays for all, Nunkey pays for all." The highwayman, not wishing to waste time, and thinking it a genuine case, contented himself by aiming a murderous blow at the would-be lunatic, who, however, cleverly evaded it. Thus the poor fellow, through his training, was enabled to retain his savings.

The flow of conversation continues; it is wonderful how tongues are loosened after the wine has been circulated once or twice. Mr. Winebold, one of Goodbery's oldest friends, is telling his neighbour, Mr. Oldwig, how he thinks there must be a cock-fight on at Bonham's to-morrow, as he saw a main of cocks go down by the night mail, whose crowing in the bags, together with the clatter of the coach, had been almost deadening.

"Talking about cock-fighting," said Sir John, "reminds me of these spurs that hang over the fireplace. They belonged to my father, and were used by Gameboy, his celebrated bird that won him 1,000 guineas in a

contest in the Haymarket. A grand old bird he was. I have a painting of him in the hall."

"Yes," says Oldwig, "we have not the same strain that we had; they don't fight with the same vigour and perseverance; if we could only get back some of the same sort, we should be able to make a pot of money."

Talk and jokes and laughter are at their height, when suddenly there is a call for silence. This is immediately gained for the would-be speaker, who is no other than our friend, Mr. Oldwig. He proposes the chief toast of the evening in the following terms:

"Ladies and Gentlemen,—It is with great pleasure that I rise this evening to propose the health of my dear old friend, Sir John. (Cries of No, no, not old.) We were boys together at school, and have hunted in this county since that date. How long ago that is I will not say, for I have arrived at that time of life when, like young ladies, I am squeamish about mentioning dates. We all know what a good sportsman he is, how keen he is to hounds, and that his purse is always forthcoming when required for the promotion of sport or to alleviate distress. (Cries of Hear, hear, uproarious applause, and great jingling of glasses.) I do not wish to make a long speech, gentlemen, but I think upon an occasion like the present, I may, perhaps, be permitted to say one thing more—and that is, may Sir John be with us many years to participate in the pleasures of the chase, and to prove himself a benefactor to the neighbourhood as he has always been."

Then, turning to Sir John, the speaker continues: "On behalf of all the friends whom you are so hospitably entertaining here to-night, I have much pleasure, Sir, in presenting you with this little token of our affection and esteem." With this the speechmaker

presents his host with a handsome snuff-box with a hunting scene cleverly depicted on the lid. "I may say, gentlemen," continues the speaker, "that I consider it a privilege and an honour to be allowed to assert that I am this gentleman's oldest friend. Gentlemen, there is one other thing I should like to do before I sit down, and that is—to wish our dear friend, Mr. Goodbery, long life and happiness, and many happy returns of to-day."

The speaker then subsides to the accompaniment of heavy applause, which is immediately renewed as Sir John rises, and in a few well-selected words returns thanks for their cordial wishes and kind presentation. He concludes by saying that there is a toast which must not be omitted, and that he will therefore call upon Winebold to propose "The King and Fox-hunting."

This toast having been proposed and drunk with much enthusiasm, a gentleman then sings a song which I think I must produce, as it will give the reader an idea of the jovial songs of the time of which I am writing. It is sung by a young tenor with a clear bell-like voice, the assembled guests joining very heartily in the well-known chorus :

At the sound of the horn
We rise in the morn,
And waken the woods as we thunder along.
Yoix, yoix, tally ho !
After Reynard we go.
While echo on echo redoubles the song,

We waken the woods as we thunder along,
Tally ho ! Tally ho !
After Reynard we go,
While echo on echo redoubles the song.

Not the steeds of the sun,
Our brave coursers outrun,
O'er the mound, horse and hound, see us bound in full cry.
Like Phœbus we rise
To the heights of the skies,
And, careless of danger, five bars we defy.
We waken, etc.

At eve, sir, we rush
And are close to his brush.
Already he dies, see him panting for breath.
Each feat and defeat
We renew and repeat,
Regardless of life, so we're in at the death.
We waken, etc.

With bottles at night,
We prolong the delight,
Much Trimbush we praise, and the deeds that were done,
And yoix, tally ho!
The next morning we go
With Phœbus, to end as we mount with the fun.
We waken, etc.

At this stage, the ladies having retired, punch bowls, port wine, and churchwardens are produced. In accordance with the good old custom, a fox's brush is dipped into the punch, as it gives it a flavour. Mr. Steeples, the parson, who is never absent on these festive occasions, and is always surrounded by eager listeners, tells the oft-told tale of his interview with his bishop about fox-hunting.

"You see," says he, "when I came to this village as a curate, and saw all the hunting which goes on in this county, I naturally felt much inclined to participate in the exhilarating amusement, for you must know that in my college days at Oxford I kept a nag, and used to manage to work in a day's hunting now and then. You

can imagine it rather made my mouth water to be located in the thick of the sport and not to be able to take part. At last I made up my mind to approach my bishop on the subject. I thought the matter well over first and decided not to write, but, if possible, to have a personal interview with him. I was fortunate enough to find him a few weeks later officiating in a neighbouring village at the consecration of a church. Being invited to dine with him I had just the opportunity I wanted, so after dinner (if you are asking a favour it is best to approach a man after he has dined well) I began very cautiously. I first of all felt his pulse on shooting matters, and then gradually led him on to the grand topic of fox-hunting. What was my delight to find that in his younger days he had excelled in the pigskin. I therefore made a bold plunge at once, and asked him if he would object to my hunting occasionally. To this he replied :—

"'I have no objection, Mr. Steeples, to your hunting, but I must make one condition ; it is that if you hunt *you ride straight to hounds.*'"*

The tale is greeted with a hearty roar of laughter, and upon this Mr. Winebold, not to be outdone, relates an occurrence that he avows took place at his uncle's house a few years ago.

"Now, you know," says Winebold, "that my uncle is

* It appears that in these times the clergy were of a much hardier race than those of the present day, for I find an advertisement, taken from the *St. James's Chronicle* of about a century ago, where the advertiser wished to meet with a man who was not only useful but ornamental. It reads as follows:— "Wanted immediately, a good, strong, bony man, to act in the capacity of curate. He must be subject to the following particulars, viz.: to have no objection to act as gardener, husbandman, and occasional whipper-in. Any gent whom the above may suit, on application to Mr. B., at the Gray's Inn Coffee House, Holborn, may meet with immediate employ. N.B.—Character will not be so much required as equestrian skill, and none need apply who has not undergone a complete stabalarian education."

a man who has one of the finest cellars of wine in this country. Unfortunately, like most men who are in a position to have such a cellar, he is prevented by the doctor's orders from doing justice to it; the family butler, therefore, knows more about the wine than his master. One day my uncle gave a dinner, and when the cloth had been removed, and the first and second bottle had been emptied, he called for another and another. On enquiry from the butler as to what vintage he had produced with the last bottle, my uncle modestly called attention to the wine, saying it was considered the finest vintage he had in his cellar. The wine was solemnly passed round, smelt, viewed, and tasted—its colour, condition, and vinocity being fully discussed and praised. One gentleman suggested that it was pretty drinking; another, holding up his glass to the light, declared the wine was a poem. I had my doubts, as the wine appeared to me to be nothing less than culch; still, not wishing to cry stinking fish, especially at my relative's table, I was naturally silent on the point. The next day, however, on passing the butler's pantry, I dropped in to have a word with old Corks, the butler, and whispered into his ear my doubts and fears as to the last bottle produced. A look of horror passed across his rubicund features.

"'Oh lor', sir," says he, 'I suppose the cat's out of the bag.'

"'What do you mean?' I said.

"'Well,' says he, 'I suppose it is all out.'

"'You had better make a clean breast of it, Corks', said I, 'it is only between you and me, all the rest of the party are as innocent as lambs.'

"'Well, sir, it was like this; the master ordered another bottle, and I had not time to go down into the

cellar myself, but sent down the under-footman and told him to decanter it carefully. The master then rang the bell, as you know, and told me to hurry up the wine, and then another footman saw a bottle standing on the dresser in my pantry, and poured it into a clean decanter, and handed it to me quite unsuspicious. I placed it before you gentlemen, but as a matter of fact the wine you drank was a bottle of half-crown port that we had bought that morning from the village inn for soup flavouring. Don't mention it to anyone, sir, please, or I should doubtless lose my place.'

"It is needless to say that I never divulged the secret of the last bottle to my uncle's guests, to whom the reputation of my uncle's cellar is still untarnished."

After a prolonged sitting, for Oldwig is loth to leave so good a vintage, the gentlemen at length rise from the table to join the ladies in the drawing-room. Before going upstairs, however, Sir John leads his guests to the kitchen, where they lend their countenance for a few minutes to the servants' ball which is taking place this evening. What a glorious old kitchen it is, with its highly-burnished spits, like a small armoury; well-scoured copper pans and other culinary utensils all tend to give it a homely, if not an artistic appearance. The dance is at its height when Sir John and his party enter the kitchen, and though their presence perhaps rather damps the ardour of the dancers for a time, the not-unnatural shyness soon wears off, and the dance goes on as merrily as ever. Great is the rivalry between old Jowles, the huntsman, and William the coachman for the first dance with the pretty housemaid; they both declare that she has promised it to them. They are, however, both married men, and

as there is a young gamekeeper in attendance at whom the girl has been setting her cap for some weeks past, these worthies' aspirations are dashed to the ground. The comfortable-looking cook has arrayed herself this evening in a cap with bows of many colours, and during the dance, which has now become fast and furious, anyone can in a moment find out where she is, as the head-gear is a prominent feature in the room. Old Jowles and his late opponent, having discovered their suit to be hopeless, console themselves in a corner of the room by dispensing a huge bowl of punch. The page-boy, or perhaps I should say the house-boy, for in those days they were so denominated in country houses, is romping round with a huge dairymaid, who any moment threatens to carry him off his legs or otherwise do him serious damage.

The country dance is now formed, and the giggling and laughter of the maids is heard before the minstrels strike up the exciting strains of "Sir Roger de Coverley." Sir John and all his guests take part in this old-established dance, but it is not their intention to remain long, as no doubt the domestics will enjoy themselves more when their presence is withdrawn. Accordingly, when the dance is finished, the house party return to the hall, and settle down to card-games and other amusements. When the gentlemen arrive, they find Miss Janet standing in an interesting attitude under a huge arch leading into an ante-room, just beneath a large bunch of mistletoe. Oldwig approaches Goodbery, and nudging him knowingly in the ribs, calls upon him to improve the occasion by a display of gallantry.

Now it must be remembered that these gentlemen had dined, and in the days of which I am writing it

was not an unusual occurrence to come across a sportsman who was capable of absorbing large quantities of port after dinner; they were technically called good doers. Not for a moment would I class our respectable hero as even a two or three bottle man, but at the same time he had dined, and we all know that gentlemen of naturally excitable temperament are perhaps more prone to be rash after dinner than before. Therefore, in the impulse of the moment, he throws his arms around Miss Janet and salutes her with a thwacking kiss, almost like the report of a pistol, which is greeted by a round of hearty applause by the guests.

Miss Janet is at first inclined to resent the liberty taken by Mr. Goodbery, but when she finds she is laughed down by the assembled guests she takes the matter in good part, and says she will have to retaliate by catching Mr. Goodbery asleep and winning a pair of gloves from him. After this Miss Janet subsides into an easy chair, and makes vigorous use of her smelling-salts and fan, for it is evident that the kiss has fired her soul. Her hopes are doubly strengthened, she believes that Mr. Goodbery is at last relenting and that the dawn of love is at hand. No doubt she soliloquizes that he begins to feel the solitudes of bachelor life at his age. Up to the present time he has been too bashful to openly plead his cause. What more natural for a fox-hunting gentleman than to break the ice in this rough and ready manner. The more she thinks over it the more she is convinced that Mr. Goodbery only requires encouragement. Had he known the effect of that harmless kiss, poor Goodbery would no doubt have given the best hunter in his stable to have recalled it.

CHAPTER III.

THE next day snow is on the ground. It is Christmas morning, and the majority of the party determine to walk to church and brave the elements. The Squire, for so Sir John is called, makes a point of going to church with the party every Christmas day, and his old pew is well filled. A picturesque sight presents itself as they near the village church, nestling amongst the high trees, whose slender boughs are covered with a slight coating of snow. The bells are ringing out their merry chimes, and the peasantry, dressed in their best attire, are wending their way to the old church. Within a beautiful sight unfolds itself, for tender hands have been busily engaged for days past adorning the interior of this edifice with Christmas decorations; even the statue of Sir Hugh Flambers, that projects boldly from the chancel wall, has lost a good deal of its severity by the exquisite designs arranged around it. The sun is straggling through the stained glass windows, gilding with its ruddy light the polished oak pews. The village choir, although not dressed in surplices as in the present day, are clattering noisily into the gallery, and the service is about to begin. The Squire throws a cursory glance round the church, for he always encourages as large an attendance on Christmas morn as possible.

It is not an unusual thing for many of the congregation to sleep during the sermon, which is, perhaps, rather

longer and more uninteresting than it need be. It is wonderful how they manage to wake up at the right time. Perhaps the parson gives the sleepers notice by raising his voice towards the termination of his sermon. But one who does not sleep, and cannot hear, is a certain old chap who works on the roads, and growing old, likewise is becoming deaf, although he will never admit his infirmity to anyone. Asked one day by the vicar if he could hear his sermons, he replied, "Well, not so well as I used to, parson, for you see there are a sight more in your congregation than there used to be."

"But what difference does that make?" said the clergyman.

"Why, all the difference in the world," replied the old road man. "You see, I sits at the back of the church, and under you sits old Giles, with his mouth wide open a swallerin' it, and three pews behind him is Walker, with his hand up to his ear, a listenin' and takin' in as much as he can get, and just before me is old Brown, with his big ears wide open, soakin' in all he can; so you see, parson, that by the time it reaches me, it is pretty poor stuff, I can tell yer!"

The musical part of the service is conducted by amateurs, somewhat under difficulties, it must be confessed, as there is no organ in the church. Still, it is surprising how well the musicians keep in time and tune, especially considering that they are self-taught. No doubt, having so long played together—some of them have played every Sunday for over thirty years—they place great confidence in one another. The orchestra, which is at the end of the church in a gallery, consists of a flute, clarionet, two violins, a cello, and a bass, and very sweet music they discourse. Would that

many such orchestras remained now, instead of the squeaky harmoniums that have replaced them. These good musicians, at Christmas time, go round to play at dances, and on New Year's Eve they perform the accompaniment to the carol singers. The pews are square and roomy, especially the Squire's, which much resembles a loose box, and has accommodation for a dozen or so.

Talking about pews reminds me of a tale that I cannot refrain from telling. A certain gentleman (a great man in his own estimation) who was more proud of his worldly goods than he should have been, was in the habit, when a collection was being made, of placing his intended donation on the top of the pew rail in the most conspicuous position he could find. A visitor to the village who was a bit of a wag in his way, hearing of this gentleman's peculiarity, thought how he might break him of this ostentatious habit. The next Sunday when the plate was about to be handed round, the proud donor, as usual, placed half-a-sovereign with a clink on the rail, and awaited the arrival of the plate. Hearing a similar clink in front of him, he noticed that a sovereign had been deposited in a similar manner. Not to be outdone, he placed a sovereign beside his half-sovereign, and again awaited the plate's arrival. What was his surprise to again see another sovereign deposited in the front pew. He was not to be outdone thus by a paltry stranger, so again drawing forth his purse, he placed one more sovereign on the rail. This was capped by another from the stranger and replied to as before by the pompous giver. At this moment the plate arrived and the rich man's money was placed therein. At the same time, the stranger (who subsequently turned out to be a London

apprentice out on a holiday) swept off all the coins he had placed on his pew, shot them into his pocket, and quickly replaced them by a threepenny-piece. What the feelings of the great man were I will leave the reader to imagine.

On issuing from the church, Sir John and his party are received with much deference by those of the worshippers who have remained behind to chat for a few moments in the churchyard. Sir John is deservedly a popular landlord, and many a rustic face brightens at his cheery nod of recognition and hearty Christmas greeting.

The Buckskin Hall party now return home, Sir John, however, finding time to run round to the vestry first to persuade the Vicar and his wife to return with him to lunch.

After lunch the Squire takes Goodbery aside and whispers to him that while the young folk are enjoying a romp, he would, perhaps, like to walk round the place with him.

Goodbery is of course delighted, and so the two old cronies set out for their afternoon stroll. They first visit the stables, a fine building, surmounted by a high bell and clock tower; the clock has only one hand, so that the spectator can read the hour without difficulty, but is compelled to guess the minute. The stable is well stocked with horse-flesh, for in the days before railways were invented it was essential for people living in the country to have a good establishment. Approaching a box Sir John points out proudly, from a number of others, his favourite horse, an animal of a rare stamp and grand appearance.

After this they sally forth to view the kennels, where they are received by old Jowles, the huntsman, dressed

in a bed-gown sort of coat and old tanned leathers, for Jowles is a careful man, and although it is Christmas Day he will not spoil his master's livery, and keeps his old clothes for kennel use. Very different he looks when at the head of his pack, leading them out on a hunting morning with his old-fashioned hunting cap and voluminous red coat. Even the horse on which he rides knows more about hunting than many a Christian.

The hounds are all carefully reviewed, their merits discussed upon, and their shortcomings described.

"There is a good old hound," says Sir John, "one of the most reliable in the pack. No better one to take out when you are entering young ones, she is so steady, and never from a puppy have I known her to run riot or give tongue unless she is on the line of a fox. Here, again," pointing to a fine upstanding bitch, "is Marigold, the truest and best of hounds that was ever whelped. She is a five-seasons bitch, and one of the fleetest I have. I can always tell her notes when I hear her give tongue in cover, as they are so melodious. And there is a promising young one," which at that moment comes up and places its fore paws against the Squire, who fondles its head and encourages it with a winning little cry.

In an adjoining kennel of diminutive proportions a pack of beagles are kept. These are the property of Eric Jarvis.

Evening is drawing in, so after a stroll round the deer park, passing an old water-mill which supplies the mansion with water, and calling in to give instructions at a gamekeeper's cottage, they return to the house, where they discover the party assembled in the drawing-room discussing afternoon tea. Sir John and Goodbery are not much addicted to this new habit of tea-

drinking, so prefer to retire to the host's snug sanctum, where they while away the time until dinner with an animated conversation, principally upon their favourite topic—Foxhunting.

CHAPTER IV.

THE snow having all gone, Sir John, having to drive into the market town, requests Mr. Goodbery to accompany him, to which that worthy gladly acquiesces. Sir John's gig and short-docked black mare are soon at the front door, the latter impatiently pawing the ground. Sir John takes his seat in the gig and gathers up the reins, and Goodbery seats himself in a twinkling by his side. Old Snaffles, the coachman, lets go the mare's head and they are soon in a swinging trot to the market town.

Very different was travelling in the days of which I am writing, before the iron horse had cut up our lovely country and made the day hideous by its shrieks and screams. No trouble or excitement of catching trains, which are nothing more or less than continual appointments which must be punctually kept.

Our two friends drive through the country lanes; the fresh air as it is wafted in their faces, making them feel that life is worth living. They pass the village forge and are saluted by the brow-bedewed smith who for a moment relaxes his work to touch his forelock to Sir John. Now they are passed by the well-laden mail which has been delayed owing to the amount of hampers and packages which there were to collect, and the coachman, good man that he is, is trying to make up his time. The heavy coach rattles past Sir John, and in a

moment is lost in the turn of the road. Time is of little importance to our friends, so they pull their horse into a walk to avoid bringing him in hot into the stable. Several farmers' carts are wending their way to the market town freighted with sheep and pigs, and with coops of fowls and ducks suspended around and underneath their vehicles.

Old ladies laden with eggs, butter and vegetables, are all making in the same direction, for market-day only comes round once a week, and when it does it is a day of no mean importance. They shortly arrive at the outskirts of the old town where the cattle market is already assuming an aspect of unwonted activity. Herds of wild-looking bullocks are being driven hither and thither in an aimless manner, much to the jeopardy of foot passengers who seem unable, despite their activity, to avoid the formidable-looking horns of these droves of cattle.

At length they arrive at their destination, and drive in under the arch of the old Green Dragon, where a number of carriages of every description are ranged round the yard. Several groups of farmers are conversing together over their sample bags of wheat, whilst their wives and families are busily engaged in the town transacting their housekeeping duties for the week. All is bustle and animation.

Strolling out into the town our friends are soon in the vortex of the horse market, where several useful looking animals are being paraded with their gaily-plaited manes to attract the observation of purchasers. Mr. Goodbery, who wishes to be conversant with the ruling price of the corn market, adjourns with Sir John to the Town Hall, under which the market is being conducted. Dozens of stalls are surrounded by eager

farmers who have brought their samples to realise them. The market is now in full swing, and Mr. Goodbery discusses agricultural topics with farmers of his acquaintance till it is time to return to the Green Dragon to partake of the market ordinary.

Large numbers of farmers are already seated round the table, at which huge joints of roast beef and boiled mutton are being carved by the landlord and served round with great activity by the attendants.

"Now then, my boy," says a burly farmer to his son, "have you got a good appetite?" to which the boy replies in the affirmative.

"All right, then, slip into it, for it is all the same price, the two shillings cover it all, and you can have as many helpings as you like. Cut and come again. I am sorry to say I am not very hungry to-day, and perhaps can't do such justice to the ordinary as I ought to, but you will no doubt be able to take it out and punish the joint."

After again walking round the market, and making a purchase of a few articles, our friends re-enter the yard.

How few of these picturesque yards are in evidence in the present day, with their many balconies and red roofs. A very convenient feature of these old-fashioned inns was that the traveller was able to dine and sleep within easy reach of the stables where his nags were quartered, so that he could, without great exertion, pay them a visit if he wished to see how they fared.

The two gentlemen enter a long room, where a number of well-to-do farmers are sitting round a large fire, drinking hot grog. Sir John takes a seat and calls for hot punch for himself and his friend.

Old Boniface, the landlord, brings it them himself, as it is not every day that he has the honour of a visit from

such important guests as Sir John and Mr. Goodbery. At Sir John's invitation the landlord very willingly fetches himself a glass of rum and his churchwarden, and joins the two other gentlemen.

Boniface does not consider it unbusinesslike to relax a little occasionally, and to chat about the future of nations, for a sort of village Parliament is held nightly at the Green Dragon, and matters of no small importance are settled here, from the shoeing of a horse to the downfall of an empire. In the summer time the court usually sits out of doors at a long settle, fixed along the front of the inn. As the evenings draw in and become cold, the politicians adjourn to the taproom—a very pleasant little room, with sanded floor and spacious oak settles.

Over the mantelpiece hangs a picture of thrilling interest, entitled, "Squire Miller's Hounds in Full Cry." From a beam in the blackened ceiling hangs a line with a ring attached, and on the opposite wall a board is fixed, with a painting of a bull's head with a hook in its nose. This game of skill is called ring-the-bull, the object being to so swing the ring that it will catch on the hook. By means of this game it is often decided who is to pay for the ale. The landlord is a great adept, and can often accomplish the desired feat with both eyes shut. Ring-the-bull and backgammon are the two favourite pastimes indulged in at the Green Dragon.

Strange tales are related in the taproom of the Green Dragon when the snow lies deep on the ground and the wind whistles down the chimney. There is one wizened little old man, who was formerly a horse-dealer, but has now apparently no other business than to frequent the Green Dragon, who tells tales of ghosts and hobgoblins which are particularly gruesome. He

vows that his stories are true as truth, and tells them in such a vivid way that he invariably makes the hair of his hearers fairly stand on end; and when the time for departure comes, each man, after drinking just one more glass of hot grog to give him courage, makes for his home in as straight a line as his somewhat uncertain legs will carry him, casting uneasy glances over his shoulder at such uncanny things as the village pump and a hand-barrow which a neighbour has thoughtlessly left out in the road. Indeed, a certain farm labourer is fond of telling how, returning one night from a prolonged sitting of the Green Dragon Parliament, he was attacked by a man clothed in white, with whom he had a struggle for his life, and who, when the man at last freed himself from the deadly embrace, pursued him to the door of the cottage. Another strange thing happened that same night. The snow man, which the evening before, to the pride and joy of the village lads, had stood full six feet high, was found next morning lying on its back, a mangled corpse, with the mark of a large hob-nailed boot imprinted on its chaste features. But, of course, this has nothing to do with the other story.

One of the old dealer's fireside stories may, perhaps, interest the reader; but as I find that at the festive season Bill Joker is not above joining in the usual hospitality of Christmas time, the reader must make allowance for any little drawings on his imagination.

He related that years ago, on Christmas eve, returning home about twelve o'clock from a farmhouse where he had been treated like a duke, he met with an adventure that would be engraved on his memory until the day of his death.

The night was clear and frosty, a slight fall of snow having whitened the ground. He was thinking of all

the good things that had been placed before him, and how kind and hospitable his host had been. As he was passing the old church, whose tower stood out boldly in the moonlight, he thought he heard a shrill "Ha! ha!" from the graveyard. He listened, but surely he must have been mistaken, for who was likely to be there at that time of the night? He put his hand up to his eyes to screen the glare of the moonlight, and certainly thought he saw some figures bobbing about amongst the gravestones.

However, it wasn't good enough for him to linger there long, so he made up his mind to clear as soon as might be; but when he tried to run he found his legs were bound as in a nightmare. To make things worse, one of the hobgoblins in the churchyard, for that is what he had seen, had noticed him and was approaching in long steady strides. The old man shook all over, from head to foot, and threw himself down on his marrow bones and begged for mercy.

At this juncture the hobgoblin was joined by half-a-dozen more, who commenced capering round him, turning somersaults and bending themselves into impossible attitudes. After they had danced in this manner for some considerable time, one who appeared to be in authority, addressed him by his Christian name and bade him repair with them to the churchyard and join them in the game of puss in-the-corner. His knees knocked together with fright, while he said: "If you please, sir, I am only a poor, humble, hard-working man, and I would sooner go home, if your worship has no objection, as I don't know the game of puss-in-the-corner, and I ain't fit to associate with such gentlemen as you." But they wouldn't be contented with that, so several of them got hold of his arms and legs. Heigh,

presto! one, two, three and away! and he found himself jumped off the ground over the churchyard wall right among the gravestones, all in a second.

Here they once more commenced their midnight festivities, which it appears he had disturbed. He kept asking to be allowed to go home, as he said he was afraid his wife would be getting uneasy about him, but they replied:—

> Oh, come and dance in the light of the moon,
> We sha'n't keep you long, you shall go very soon!

They said he might not have the chance of joining in their Christmas revels for some time to come. He sincerely hoped he should not. Their games continued for many, many hours, to him it seemed like many years. He felt so tired he could scarce stand, much less run about like a school child at their bidding. But they wouldn't let him go; do all he might it was impossible to get away.

Presently he thought he saw the lights of a gig in the distance coming his way. He tried to shout to attract the driver's attention, but found his voice was gone. He was near fainting from fatigue and fear, when all of a sudden, just in the same way as they had caught hold of him before, Heigh, presto! out of the churchyard (over the tower this time), right into the middle of the road plump he went.

After recovering from the shock, he picked himself up, looked round and saw the lights of the gig approaching, and what was his joy to see it was Farmer Giles returning home after having been to a similar entertainment at a neighbouring farm house. He got into his gig without being asked, and was driven home. "You see," said the narrator, "how white my hair is. The night before

that adventure it was raven black, but when I got up the next morning and looked in the glass it was as you see it now." This yarn was afterwards explained by a side wind, as Giles found him in the middle of the road, and smelling very strong of rum!

This and many similar stories Sir John has himself often heard; but he does not wish to wait long to-day, as it is growing dusk, and he is anxious to reach home before dark; so orders are given to harness the mare.

As they are leaving the yard they pass the mail coach on its return journey, and as the driver was once in the service of Sir John, in my next chapter I will give the reader an account of one of the old coachmen of the past.

CHAPTER V.

JOHN KLINKER was a fine specimen of the coachman of the olden days, and it did one's heart good on a fine May morning, to "pass the time o' day" with him, as he made his way to the stables dressed in a light-coloured down-the-road coat, adorned with a button-hole, his ruddy face beaming beneath a white hat that had done him service for many seasons, but still was of creditable appearance. He always took the greatest care of that hat, never donning it if the weather looked threatening, and should a shower of rain chance to come on, the guard knew without being told that it was the first consideration to get the leather hat-case out of the boot and to exchange the precious white hat for a dark one of a similar build, but turned up with green.

This old Jehu having passed the best part of his existence on the coach-box, and having mixed during that time with many passengers of superior birth and education to himself, had to a large extent acquired their mode of speech and manner. He never used strong language, which was remarkable, as this accomplishment was, as a rule, part and parcel of a coachman's acquirements in the days of coaching; and above all he never lost his temper, which last is one of the best qualifications a whip can possess. How many young drivers we see in the present day on a box

who have mistaken their vocation. They think it the proper thing to punish their poor horses for any shortcomings of their own; and many a time have I remonstrated with an infuriated driver for thrashing his horses when perhaps they had been quite in the right and the driver entirely in the wrong.

Then there is a class of young men who are very fond of showing off their abilities. These fellows will spring their horses just to show the passengers that they can drive above-a-bit, the consequence being that at the end of the journey the steam is all out of their animals. Horses so treated seldom or never carry any flesh.

But our John was cast in a different mould. He knew what horses could do and what they could not do. He never did things in a hurry, and yet he was always punctual. Before he mounted the box to start, he took a survey on foot to see that all was right, for, as he truly said, in these cases it was a matter of life and limb—not only his, but lives, perhaps, younger and more valuable. What a treasure this old chap was to the man who horsed the coaches. Now his former friends and admirers recall his many virtues and find his equal is not to be met.

Then, too, he was so careful of his cattle. You would hear him say to the ostler when they pulled up at the end of the stage, "Jim, I heard that grey mare cough twice coming out of the stable this morning; give her this ball to-night and a bran mash last thing." By these little attentions, taken in time, he often avoided a serious illness.

His horses he treated as his friends and fellow-workmen. They knew him as well as possible, and it was wonderful what a number of years some of them worked under him, owing to his skilful driving.

At one of the changes he would always dismount and walk up to a sportive-looking old chestnut leader, and give him an apple from his pocket, or perhaps, a little bit of biscuit. This was a particular favourite, named "Skyraker," which had been in the team for over ten years, and was supposed to have more sense than an ordinary country yokel. Klinker would talk like a father to a youngster that perhaps had only been in harness a few times. "Steady, my lad," "take it easy," "all in good time," "let the others have a chance," and so on, until the horses seemed to understand all he said to them. How proud he was of his coachers! You should have heard him proclaiming their virtues, picking out their good points and omitting their weak ones. For he remembered the old maxim :—

Be to their virtues ever kind,
And to their failings ever blind.

Then how good he was in giving hints to young coachmen. If they drove with too slack reins, he would say: "Ah, we must get the saddler to cut these reins down a bit—they are too long." The young school said he did not drive with sufficient dash, and that his horses would do the journey easier if he sprung them more at the hills. They would remark: "Now then, John, wake 'em up a bit, you're not driving a hearse!" But he knew his business too well to be perturbed by this magpie chatter. He drove as a gentleman, not as a butcher, never cracking his whip and seldom using it.

He was full of anecdote and information. He knew more about places and people than any other man in the county, and was thus able to make the time pass pleasantly on a long stage. At one particular part of the journey there was a very steep hill, from the top of which

the view was very extensive. About two miles before he reached this hill John would begin to talk about the extensive views to be obtained there, and so would work his passengers up to quite a state of curiosity and excitement. Arriving at the foot of the ascent he would pull up and recommend all those who were able to walk to take the bridle path across the fields, which met the road at the summit of the hill, assuring them that the best view was to be obtained from the path, and that they would arrive at the top before the coach. He thus lightened his load, and was able to give his horses a breathe whilst ascending.

At a certain inn he always pulled up and recommended the passengers to try the "Old October ale" that had been matured in the wood for years. This said liquor was rather too sharp for the uninitiated, but for those who knew what old ale should be, it was a veritable *bonne bouche*. The old widow, who kept this hostelry, would step out and pass the time of day, and perhaps ask him to execute some little commission for her at his destination. He had a wonderful memory for shopping, and never had recourse to a notebook. He would never forget one single item among a whole string of purchases. "Two yards of blue ribbon for Miss Brown (like pattern); three clothes baskets for Mrs. Gumball; a fork and grain shovel for Farmer Hodge;" and no end more, all of which he carefully executed, and for which he made no charge, as the people for whom he did these favours were frequent passengers. But at Christmas, it was the usual thing to make the coachman a present of a cheese, a loin of pork, or something equally suitable, as a recognition of these little services.

If behind time on his journey, he was a diplomatist in the management of his passengers. As an illustration

of this, I must give one incident. An old lady was one day entering the coach with a lap dog and a lot of parcels, and stuck half way in the door. Instead of getting in she got off the step again to remonstrate with the guard for having such small doors to the coach.

John immediately grasped the situation, and shouted out to the guard: "Now then, William, don't stand right in front of the doorway. Don't you see the lady wants to get in? Hold her parcels and help her in, can't you? for we are late, and I don't want to race the hosses off their legs if I can help it."

The old lady took the hint, as she was nervous, and was the same way of thinking as the coachman about the horses being raced off their legs.

Sometimes he would come across the hounds on his journey, and should he think the fox had crossed the road, good sportsman as he was, he would pull up for fear of spoiling the scent. From his exalted position on the box he had a fine bird's-eye view of the surrounding country, and oft-times viewed the fox. To see him rein up his team, lift his hat high above his head, and give a musical "Tally-ho!" was a sight worthy of the good old English sportsman he was.

Then, too, what news he carried from town to town! He was almost as good as a newspaper, and so true was he to time that the villagers set their clocks by his coach. At Christmas it was a cheery sight to see the coach loaded with hampers and game, all presents that were forwarded with good wishes from their several donors. For in those days a good deal more present-making went on amongst friends than nowadays. That is one of the good old customs which, like stage coaches, have died out.

There was not a driver on the road who could teach

a lad the duties of guard better than old John. He would impress upon him when he first took him in hand that there were three absolutely necessary qualifications indispensable to a good guard. Firstly, civility; secondly, despatch; and thirdly, personal appearance. Consequently, did any guard seek a situation who had been under old John, he never found much difficulty in obtaining one, as the school from which he came was well known for its efficient training.

In his youth, as I said before, John Klinker had been in Sir John's employ and had ridden second horse. This accounted for his taking so much interest in all matters connected with field sport. On Saturdays he always reserved the box seat for Sir John, who drove to attend the market, and was one of his most regular passengers. On these occasions the old driver was wont to repeat a longish tale of a broken axle, and how most of the passengers were thrown off but not injured. During the recital of this narrative he would continually turn to Sir John and ask him if it were not so, and do you remember this, that, and the other, Sir, much to the old squire's gratification.

Such was travelling a hundred years ago, before first-class carriages and electricity were in vogue. It was, to my thinking, much less monotonous than travelling in the present day, for on the road there was a constant source of amusement. But those days have disappeared like a dream. Stage coaches, coachmen, yards of tin, galloping stages, and cock horses are things of the past, to be read of in books and remembered only by a few. A few old drivers linger on to tell the tales of highway robberies and accidents in snowstorms. But the majority have driven on a journey from which neither coachman nor passenger returns.

CHAPTER VI.

A FEW days after their drive to the Green Dragon, Sir John, being in want of a coach-horse, asked Mr. Goodbery to accompany him to a dealer's yard about five miles' drive from Buckskin Hall, to see what sort of horses he has to show them. On the road the old squire is full of anecdote.

"You must know," says he, "Jim Brown, the man whose horses we are going to see, is a 'character,' and prides himself on always telling the truth, and furthermore never having bought a horse, however vicious, without having been able to tame him. So successful has he been that he has gained for himself the sobriquet of the Calmer.

"He certainly has had some queer horses in my recollection. Years ago he purchased a horse called Ginger, from a miller. This horse was so confirmed a rearer that no one could do anything with him; he was also very dangerous in the stable. But directly Brown heard that the miller was anxious to sell he made a bid of a ten-pound note and got him. When they went to fetch their new purchase the groom was nowhere to be found. On further enquiry it transpired that he was in bed, having been savaged by the horse whilst feeding him. So there was no one to put a bridle on him and lead him out. At last they got hold of a mill hand who had been attending the horse in a sort of a way during the groom's illness. 'I

have bought this horse,' said the Calmer, 'and want to take him away, perhaps you will lead him over to my place.' 'Oh! you is the gentleman who has bought Ginger, is you?' enquired the man. 'Yes, I am his new owner,' replied Mr. Brown. 'Well, I wishes you luck, that's all I can say,' replied the mill hand, 'for he's about the most rumbustical character that I have ever had to do with; as to going up to him, I dursn't. His corn I chuck over into his manger from the other stall, and his water I hand over likewise; and I cleans him out with this ere long-handled road-scraper, so as he can't reach to kick me. When he wants new litter I pitches that over likewise and let him make his own bed as best he can; but I don't do no grooming, for he has to clean himself if he wants to be cleaned, he won't get it done by me, not nohow.'

"'But surely,' said the dealer, 'you give him some exercise!'

"'No, sir, not leastways for the last six weeks or more. You see he is so wonderful wily that we can't do nothing with him when we gets him out.'

"With the aid of the silver key the dealer, after a lot of parley, at last induced the man to clamber over and untie Ginger. When this treasure arrived at the establishment of Mr. Brown he was taken in hand at once. A bridle and saddle having been put on him with much difficulty, the Calmer, with great care, mounted the new purchase, remarking as he did so, 'now let us see what this very vicious animal will'—but before he had concluded his remark he was thrown with great force on to his back. Now Mr. Brown was no novice at riding, and was considerably surprised to find himself on the ground so soon after mounting.

"'That's funny,' he remarked, 'very funny. George,'

he continued to one of his men, 'just run over to Crumpler and tell him I want him for half an hour or so.'

"Now Crumpler was a professional horse-breaker who lived in the village and was supposed to be an immaculate horseman, and never to have parted company with his horse unless they both came down together to mother earth. Before very long he arrived. He was a little, thin, old man, with his head bent slightly over to his left shoulder, doubtless an honour received whilst in battle royal with a youngster in his earlier days. He had furthermore lost one eye and had a nasty scar about the region of the mouth, both evidently caused by a severe kick from a horse.

"'Do you think you could ride this chestnut horse?' enquired the Calmer.

"'Can a fish swim,' quickly came the reply.

"'All right, get up, then, and if you can stick to him for ten minutes, I'll give you—well, I'll give you ten shillings.'

"The Crumpler was soon in the saddle at the scent of half-a-sovereign, but he was not there two seconds before he found that he had a rum customer to deal with, for with a terrific buck and a plunge Ginger sends the little man flying over his head. Nobody thought it likely that he was hurt, and the question was, of course, not asked; had not the Crumpler the reputation of being made of old leather?

"'Give me another chance for that half-sovereign, governor. I wasn't half seated that time, and hadn't got my feet in the stirrups, or I warrant he wouldn't have shifted me.'

"'All right,' said the dealer, with great magnanimity, 'one more chance.'

"He then was given a leg up, two men holding on to the horse's head while he mounted.

"'Have you settled yourself all right now?' asked the Calmer.

"'Yes, I'm all right now; let him go.'

"As the men let go the horse gave a wild spring into the air, and with vicious half-rears and plunges, something after the motion of kangaroo leaps, he made for a clump of trees at the lower end of the meadow, no doubt with the idea of carrying his rider through at racing pace, and thus ridding himself of his burden. These tricks he had tried before, with very great success, on many sportsmen; but the veteran rider had met the likes of him before, and with a fierce cut of the ashplant across the side of his head he brought him to his right bearings again. Seeing that he had an artist on his back who seemed disinclined to leave, Ginger now began a series of double-barrelled quick-action bucks, his head well tucked in between his fore-legs during the performance. But still old Crumpler sat as tight as wax, apparently enjoying his ride, for he now fancied that he would be able to claim the prize, and a smile of satisfaction played about the corners of his mouth as he thought that—

Something attempted, something done,
Will earn a night's repose.

"But Ginger was not to be beaten. There was nothing left now for him to try but his *pièce de résistance*, and that was executed by his rearing straight up and falling backwards on poor Crumpler, who received a rare squeezing. He, however, rose, covered with muck and mire, with a smile still on his homely countenance, saying that he hoped a fall like that would not disqualify him for the ten shillings.

"'No, I don't call that being pitched,' said the

governor. 'You may take another chance, and this time I will make it easier for you. I will put the long carriage-reins on him, and drive him round the paddock a few times before you mount, and if he attempts to rear I will pull him over.'

"The long pair of reins were soon buckled on, and after driving him alone for ten minutes, the Calmer tried him at backing, but this he would not brook at any price, and showed temper. 'Oh, you won't woa back, won't you, then you must be made to, my fine fellow.' Sooner than come back, he reared up as straight as an arrow. Quick as thought, with a mighty pull, the dealer has him within his power, and in a moment he lies upon the grass.

"'Now, sit on his head, and give him a good lathering,' said the Crumpler, who was still sore from his previous performance.

"'No, don't do that,' said the master, 'or we shan't, perhaps, get him to rear any more to-day; and I want to pull him over at least twice more if I can manage it, just to show him what a dangerous practice it is.'

"This performance having been repeated once more, Ginger showed a distinct disinclination to be made to rear with no one on his back.

"'Lead him back to the stables, George,' said Jim Brown, 'and let Crumpler have his chance now of drawing his money.'

"The loose box which Ginger was allotted was a large old-fashioned one, with a low plaster ceiling. Now it had occurred to the Calmer's imaginative brain that if they mounted Ginger here he would not be able to rear, as the ceiling was so low, and Crumpler might sit on his back for a quarter of an hour or so to get the saddle warm to his back, 'for,' said the dealer, 'that very likely

is the reason why he isn't quiet; he don't like a cold saddle coming on him.'

"So Ginger was led in, and Crumpler again mounted with any amount of confidence. No sooner did he feel the weight of a man on his back than up he went in a most determined fashion, and with such force that his head drove right through the lath and plaster of the old ceiling. Slipping up at the same time, they both fell over heavily on the side of the loose box, breaking down the rotten wood partition. There was a great cloud of dust and lime, and all that could be heard was a great scrambling on the floor. Presently the atmosphere cleared a little, and it was seen that Ginger had risen, and the little man was in the act of doing so.

"'Now, then,' said the Calmer, 'don't give in; get up again; he will remember this, and not repeat it. Remember that none but the brave deserve the fair; get up, get up, man; what are you waiting for?' But the Crumpler had his misgivings; he, to use his own favourite expression, had had a very rough passage, so far this morning.

"'All right, sir,' he replied; 'but might I make so bold as to ask if I am to have the ten shillings you mentioned?'

"'Yes, if you do what I tell you, and at once, you shall.'

"This time, however, the horse allowed him to be seated, and, after about ten minutes, the dealer led him out into the paddock, and lunged him round for half an hour with Crumpler riding him.

"'That is good, so far,' said the dealer. 'We will now see if he can jump, for I won't allow one with such quarters as that to remain in my establishment if he won't jump.'

"He was then tried at one or two low fences, which he would not, however, have at any price. Finding that it was impossible to make him jump by whipping and spurring, a team-horse from the farm was sent for and a strong headstall was put on Ginger. The chain-horse was put the other side of the fence and the traces attached to the chestnut's headstall; he was then dragged through or over the jump two or three times, much to his dismay and surprise, but no doubt the pricks he got from the gorse and the falls in the ditch the other side decided him that it was less trouble to jump his fences than to be pulled through them; any way, they got him to jump well at last, and if any signs of refusing showed themselves, all they had to do was to produce the chain-horse and it was wonderful what an effect it had. But still for some time after this Ginger was a horse that wanted riding, and the Calmer would bet many of his friends £10 to £5 that after a week in the stable they would not sit Ginger for fifteen minutes without a cropper. Two and a half to three minutes, after a trial, generally made the Calmer a richer man by £5. After a time, however, Ginger did seem to become more tractable, for they got him to go in harness. He certainly hated the look of a hill, and when first put in jibbed. But the Calmer was all patience, at first, at any rate. He would quickly dismount and thrust a handful of road-mud into the animal's mouth, in order, as he said, 'to change the thoughts of the horse.' Then he would mount and try to drive him up the hill, but to no purpose. There was, however, another string left to the Calmer's bow, and that was the use of his jingler, which he carried with him at the bottom of his cart. [This was a cruel contrivance, used years ago before the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals

came into existence, constructed of a piece of thick chain fixed with a staple to the end of a mop-stick.] This chain-whip, for that is what it was, he would then produce, and with it he would give Ginger one down the chine of the back. The horse thought this strange treatment, no doubt, but it soon decided him, and up the hill he went like a rocket.

"'They only want two doses of the jingler at the most,' remarked Calmer. 'I carry it for some little time in the cart, and if he shows any signs of refusing I only have to rattle the chain with my foot and he'll be off like lightning.'

"After a time they got quite fond of Ginger, and Calmer had thoughts of keeping him for his own smoking or his wife's confidential hunter.

"One day a gentleman came down to buy a hunter. He was shown several but found fault with them all. Some were too large and some too small, others too old or too young. So after a time the Calmer said he was afraid that he could not suit his customer. The gentleman, however, spied the head of old Ginger peeping out of a loose box, and remarked to the dealer that he had not shown him this horse and that he seemed just the animal to suit him. 'Ah, now,' said the Calmer, 'you have just seen one that I don't want to sell, and one that because I don't want to sell every-one wants to buy. Besides that, he is a rank wrong one; don't you have anything to do with him.' Of course, the gentlemen could hardly believe that a horse dealer would so depreciate his own property, and thinking that he was so good a horse that he wished to keep it himself, asked the price that would be accepted. 'If I sold him,' said the dealer, 'I should want £120. But, lor' sir, what is gold in the balance against serenity

in one's home. If I sell him I shall never hear the last of it from my old woman, as she has took such a fancy to him, with all his tricks. So if you do take him, have him at once, now she's away, and I can then pitch her a cock-and-bull story about the horse having been stolen in the night.'

"The gentleman was too glad to secure, as he thought, so great a bargain, and paid the money down, and took the horse away with him then and there. Within a week the purchaser returned with a long face, and said that he couldn't do anything with Ginger as he had rubbed his legs against all the trees and walls he had passed, had nearly killed him in the hunting field, had crushed his man up in the stable, and that he was very handy with his front feet when led out—in fact, a very dangerous horse, and he should be glad if Mr. Brown would take him back.

"But the Calmer declined, saying he had no room for more horses. Of course, the buyer could not say anything, as he had been told that he would not suit him. So through telling the truth, which was too hard to believe, Jim Brown parted with his favourite horse Ginger."



"HE WOULD BUY HIM!"

CHAPTER VII.

WHAT the Green Dragon has to answer for few can tell, for there have been so many convivial dinners given at that celebrated hostelry by gentlemen who are devoted to field sports, that it is not to be wondered at that, after the guests have perhaps dined not wisely but too well, many wagers of a more or less extraordinary character have from time to time been arranged. It is true that they have afforded a large amount of amusement and satisfaction to the onlookers in most cases, although some of these foolhardy undertakings have visited one or other of those engaged in his more serious hours with sorrow and remorse.

It is a cold evening and a goodly number of sportsmen are assembled in the cheery old dining-room of the "Green Dragon," which serves not only for this purpose, but is used occasionally at Christmas-time for county dances, play-actings, and the like. On this occasion the annual dinner is being given to Mr. Miller, M.F.H., and it is not surprising that on such an occasion hunting-men, after having enjoyed the pleasures of the table, should feel inclined to recount the pleasures of the chase.

Oldwig is dilating upon the speed and cleverness of his hunter, Dragoon.

"I believe," says he, addressing Winebold, "that old horse of mine would jump twenty-eight feet of water, for

when I rode him last season in the Dumpshire country we came to the River Dump where it was flooded, and I should think from the take-off to his landing it could not have been far short of that. And," continues he, "such wonderful manners, too, a child might ride him with a packthread. In fact, I believe there is not a single horse in this hunt that he couldn't show a pair of clean heels to."

Now, if there is one thing upon this earth that Winebold fancies, it is the prowess of his old brown mare, Sulphur, which he has ridden for the last six seasons, without ever being put down by her.

"I do not know," says he, "but that my old mare, Sulphur, would make your horse extend himself a bit if they came to be matched; for, as you know, I rode her the second season after I had bought her in that long run from Darlington Copse to Westbury, which is one of our stiffest lines of country. The run lasted forty-five minutes, and the company during that time was very select, especially so at the finish, and I do not think that there was any other horse in the field that pulled up as fresh as she did."

"Yes, she is a good mare," says Oldwig, "but she cannot gallop like Dragoon."

"If it comes to that," says Winebold, gulping down a glass of port and rather nettled, "I will tell you what I will do. I will ride you four miles across country, owners up, catch weights, £25 a side, pay or play, and the match shall come off within a month from date. The winner to stand a dinner to all gentlemen seated round this table at the present time. What do you say?"

"Done with you," says Oldwig, in the heat of the moment.

At the scent of a match, the assembled guests become uproarious, wagers are freely made, and great are the surmises and predictions which are uttered on all sides.

Mr. Oldwig, now that the wager is clinched, begins to have his misgivings, for has he not a wife and family who will haunt him at every fence he jumps, and, further, he has noticed several ominous twinges of the gout in the left foot during the last few days. It is noticeable that his previous flow of conversation is suddenly, as I may term it, cut off at the main. He becomes thoughtful and silent. His buoyant colour, to a certain extent, has faded, and a deep melancholy seems to have settled itself upon his features.

"I do not quite see, Winebold," says he, cautiously, "why you and I should risk our necks across country at racing pace at our time of life. Why not put up two youngsters at 12 stone 7? It would make a much more sporting event of it."

But this suggestion is met with a torrent of opposition by the assembled guests who, now that they have at last got an opportunity of seeing these two worthies figuring in the pigskin, are determined, if the matter rests with them, to put every obstacle possible in the way of allowing the match to be cried off. For are they not, independent of the sport, to be the guests of the victorious sportsman at dinner the evening after the event?

"No, I don't feel inclined to let anyone else ride my mare," is Winebold's reply, "for, to tell you the truth, I think you have got hold of the rough end of the stick, and that you won't have a look in."

"All right," said Oldwig, "if you are so keen on riding. Don't for one moment think I wish to disappoint you, for nothing gives me greater pleasure than

putting myself in training for a steeplechase. For you must know that it is not so many years ago that my name was not unknown between the flags."

"Very good," said Winebold. "I shall not disappoint you, and may the best man win."

It may, perhaps, seem ludicrous to the reader to hear of two gentlemen who scale between sixteen and seventeen stone in the buff, talking as though they were veritable flyers of the chase; but it is wonderful when one is put on one's metal after dinner how small the fences seem to become and how great our hearts grow.

"I shall start to-morrow," says Winebold, "and put myself into thorough training. Two suits of old clothes, a couple of great coats, four pints of hot water taken inwardly, and five miles in and out, methinks, will soon reduce me to something like a racing weight."

This remark is greeted with a round of applause.

"Well done, Winebold! that's right, never put your hand to the plough and turn back. Sit well back and chuck your heart over the fences first."

"I shall be out every morning just after sunrise," says Oldwig, thinking he must make some retort to this sally, "and give Dragoon his morning gallops, for I have always found, with my training experience, that you can always do more before breakfast than at any other time. I remember what training I was in when Lord Ukshire came and begged and implored me to ride his bay filly for the Ukshire Stakes, and, I think, if I am not mistaken, that after three weeks or so I shall be as fit as I was then."

A willing and eager committee is at once formed to organise the meeting. The money is staked, the scene of the event being kept a complete secret by these gentlemen, so as not to give either rider a preference

over the other by viewing the course previous to the eventful day.

At first Winebold seems to be rather the favourite, 6 to 4 being laid on him in guineas, but when it leaks out that the excitement may perhaps cause him to take too much nourishment before the contest, the betting falls back to evens.

Still, everybody feels that Winebold has an excellent chance of winning, especially as he possesses a tip-top man in his stable for getting horses into condition. Before this fellow entered Mr. Winebold's employ he was for some years in the service of a certain Mr. Mouldy, M.F.H., a very stingy man, who was familiarly known as Miser Mouldy. This gentleman, with all his parsimonious habits, had a great passion for fox-hunting, and a good knowledge of the craft to boot. Not that his hobby cost him anything; far from it. Some went so far as to say that he made a profit out of keeping the hounds; but Miser Mouldy was a man in a thousand, and a wonderful manager, for not only did he arrange to have his hunting for nothing, but contrived to run the establishment with Payne (the man who is now in Mr. Winebold's service) and a boy about sixteen. Certainly the master lent a hand in an emergency, but the rule of his house was early to rise and late to bed.

"No human being requires more than four or five hours' sleep," Miser would say, "and those who think they do ain't no good to me."

Being a bachelor and a woman-hater, the miser lived his own life, hunting his hounds three days a week, during the season, Payne and the boy whipping in for him. He entertained as few guests as possible; not that many were eager to accept his hospitality, for it was of the roughest kind. When Payne accepted the

position of useful and odd man in this establishment with an honorarium of three shillings a week and the full run of his teeth at his master's expense, he could not complain that he was required to do anything that was not strictly in accordance with the conditions on which he was engaged. For on rising in the morning, his duties on a non-hunting day were to light the fire and to boil the kettle for his master's breakfast. He would then go into the kennels, feed the hounds, then on to the stables, and after dressing and feeding the horses, return to the house for breakfast, which meal he partook of with his master, as that gentleman preferred to have him with him whilst eating, as too much time otherwise was occupied over the repast. He also found that Payne's appetite was held within more reasonable bounds than it would have been, had he breakfasted alone. After this hasty meal the cow had to be milked and the pigs fed. After this an hour or more was spent in the house, making his master's bed, cleaning the knives, forks, boots and shoes. The tackle and hunting leathers had then to be done, and after much smudging and rubbing, this would bring him up to about dinner-time. In the afternoon he did little odd jobs in the garden, planting potatoes, earthing up celery, or whatever came to hand, for he was an all-round man and could turn his hand to anything. Then there was more feeding in the stables to be done, the hay and straw to be got in from the barn, and many more little jobs, too numerous to mention. At the end of the day his master would ofttimes call his faithful henchman a lazy dog. After a time Payne got tired of all work and no play, and suggested that as his master did not appreciate his services, that he would like to leave at the end of the season.

"All right," said Mouldy, "have your own way; but you may go further and fare worse. Remember it is not in every place that you will be treated with the same consideration as you have been here."

Mr. Winebold came across this *multum in parvo*, on Newmarket Heath, some months after he had left the M.F.H.'s service. Remembering his face, he asked him what he was doing to gain a livelihood. Payne replied that up to the present he was starving, but that he was looking out for a situation. Mr. Winebold, being in want of a man of so vast an experience, at once engaged him, knowing well that he was just the one to look after his hunters and keep them in good condition. And never, from that day up to the present, has he regretted his choice, for he has never before been carried so well and found his horses so fit. But I am digressing from our tale.

"What sort of a country, may I enquire," says Oldwig, resuming the conversation in as bold a tongue as he can muster, "are you going to select for us to ride over, because you must remember they must be all fair hunting jumps, and if I might be allowed to suggest I should have it over a moderately easy country, for I do not suppose that Winebold is particularly anxious to make Mrs. Winebold a widow, for I am thinking that some of those oak posts and rails about the Rosbery country smell rather strong of coffins."

"Don't mind me," says Winebold, now thoroughly alive to the situation, "the stiffer the line the better I shall like it."

With this remark Mr. Winebold again tosses off a collar-glass of port, for he remembers that he must keep up his reputation, and the larger he talks the more

likely is Oldwig to pay forfeit sooner than enter into the contest. But he has mistaken his man, for is there not a month to spare? argues Oldwig to himself; may not many things happen in that time? strained sinews, over-reaches, curbs sprung, and what not, for these are contingencies always to be borne in mind in matters of this kind, and it would indeed be a false move to pay forfeit when something may happen to his opponent's horse before the day, in which event, of course, he will draw forfeit, for he means to stick to the terms to the letter and not give Winebold a chance of another mount if anything should happen to his horse.

The matter having been thoroughly thrashed out, our friends depart for the night and dream about the two competitors jumping yawning abysses, and arms of the sea.

CHAPTER VIII.

THREE weeks have elapsed, both jockeys have entered thoroughly into the spirit of the race, and it is noticeable that they both look much lighter, healthier, and younger for their training, for when, I ask, does a man feel better than when he has put himself in strict training for a few weeks. It is true that both Oldwig and Winebold have ever since secretly regretted the match made after dinner, and were they the only parties concerned, it is a certainty that it would never have been decided, but, as the reader knows, there are other interested parties who have staked their money, a vast amount of trouble has been taken on all sides, the line of country has been chosen, and the meeting to a certain extent has become known, so that it is out of the question for them to withdraw.

The opponents are on the best of terms. It was only when they met in the market town yesterday that Oldwig was saying that he had that morning, whilst turning out some clothes in his wardrobe, come across his old racing colours, which he had donned, disporting himself before his cheval-glass, much to his own gratification and his wife's displeasure. Winebold retorted by saying that Sulphur was in wonderful condition, and the only fault he could find was that she gallops too fast and jumps too big.

As we have already hinted, Mrs. Oldwig is a power in the house in which she dwells. Oldwig up to the

present has contrived not to mention this engagement that he has entered into in his family circle, fearing to arouse his wife's ire, for he knows that for years past she has objected to his hunting, saying that a man of his age ought to know better than to be always galloping after a lot of dogs' tails dressed up in a red coat, looking more like a red water-butt than a human being. Still, up to the present she has tolerated his hunting, but Oldwig has a shrewd suspicion that if this match leaks out, she is quite capable of putting a stop to the whole affair. He therefore deems silence to be golden, trusting that the local gossip will not reach her ears, "for," says he, "it is bad enough to have to ride this infernal race without having one's wife bullying and threatening all the time." Very careful he has had to be in these early morning exercise gallops, lest he should arouse her suspicions. He has had to lay his plans like a clever general, and has told her that he is getting too stout, and has determined to reduce his weight, as Doctor Viles has said he fears his health will suffer otherwise, and so he has determined to take a couple of hours' walking exercise round his farm before breakfast every morning.

So far his strategy has been complete. However, this is not the only difficulty that Oldwig has had to contend with, for the latest reports from the Winebold stable are to the effect that Sulphur is as fit as a fiddle and as sound as a bell. It seems as though this race, backed up as it is by all his friends, will have to take place.

Oldwig is too good a sportsman to cry off by the mere invention of his horse having a sore back or an influenza cold. To a certain extent he has hardened his heart. A sporting young friend has volunteered his offices to act as trainer, and has given him his

instructions as to what fences he should ride over for practice; it has been to a certain extent satisfactory to have a trainer, although Oldwig has occasionally rebelled against his adopted master. "It's all very well," he would say, "for you to point out those thundering great jumps for me to ride at while you look on, but I can tell you I am not going to break my horse's back for your satisfaction:" and though he has been argued with, and told that the fences he will have to encounter in a week's time will be similar to these or even larger, Oldwig has retorted, "It will be bad enough to jump the beastly things then without having to do so now in cold blood, and what's more, I don't mean to do so. Order me as much galloping as you like and I'm your man, but I am not going to be eternally jumping fences just to satisfy you."

Sir John Jarvis is looking forward to this meeting with the greatest expectation, and has arranged to drive over a party of friends from Buckskin Hall on his drag to witness the race, for are they not two of his oldest friends? And although he regrets that they have been led into this wager, yet he cannot refrain from being present on the occasion.

At last the eventful day arrives—as beautiful a morning for the time of year as one could desire.

A large assembly of carriages are drawn up in a grass field on a hill, where a red flag flutters from a hop pole. The course is to a steeple seen in the blue distance nestling amongst the trees—two miles as the crow flies, the finishing flag being in a parallel line about half a mile distant, thus obviating the necessity of having to cross more than one or two of the same fields on the return journey.

Winebold has ridden over in good time, and has paid a visit to all the carriages assembled at the rendezvous,

sampling their wines, for it is needless to say that one and all of these conveyances are well freighted with refreshments for their occupants and any chance friends as well who may happen to be there.

Winebold is saying to Miss Richmond, who is seated in a brake, that on an occasion like this he feels he ought to keep his stamina up, for he is shortly to undergo a great trial of strength, and will need all his resources to be able to cope with it. To which the young lady replies: "Mr. Winebold, let me offer you a glass of sherry—papa's Amontillado, you know, which you have tasted before."

It is needless to say Mr. Winebold thanks her for her kindness, and says that he really feels quite faint, for nothing has passed his lips that morning since he left home. He then strolls off to have a chat with one or two late arrivals, and, having joined them in drinking success to himself, he thinks it about time to see to the saddling of his mare.

Mr. Oldwig has arrived, and looks pale but confident; and although he has been seen to disappear mysteriously behind several carriages, and to re-appear wiping his mouth, yet it is evident that he has a fixed determination not to take more than he can comfortably carry, as he knows he will require within a very short time all his nerve and judgment, perfectly free and untrammelled.

A group of farm labourers are standing together as Oldwig rides by, and one of them is heard to observe, in no moderate tones, "as how 'e shouldn't care to take on this 'ere job himself because he hev just walked from his cottage to this 'ere place across the fields where, these 'ere gents are going to ride; and the fences before you come to the Drencher stream in the bottom has been made up and is terrible big places, with ditches t'other side big enough to bury a rigiment of soldiers in."

Oldwig shudders as he passes on, and thinks of what may be the outcome of all this.

Poor fellow, he has passed a bad night, for unfortunately, at the last moment, his wife has been informed by some officious meddler of her husband's rash wager. Little sleep has he had last night, for he has received a continual curtain lecture something after the following style :

"To think of you, the father of a family, getting on for 60, telling me that you feel old age fast creeping over you, and you cannot ride to hounds as you did, and that you think you will have to give it up, and that, anyway, you won't hunt more than two days a week, and when you do only ride at gaps ; and what do you think all your friends will say, wagering your money in a profligate way like this? You ought to be ashamed of yourself, you ought, distressing a good, amiable wife like you have. You ought to have married a vixen, she would have given you no peace ; and I suppose if you break your ribs or injure your spine you will expect me to nurse you day and night, after I have warned you as I have. If you had been called out to battle by a press-gang or anything like that, and been obliged to go, that would have been a different thing ; but this is a thing you go and openly seek yourself, simply to satisfy your own vanity. That's why you wear that red coat. I know all about it. It's no good telling me," and so on, till she was quite worn out and tired, and poor Oldwig was allowed to fall into a fitful slumber.

Oldwig throws his eyes across the country in the direct line he will soon be traversing. How small the fences look in the distance to an unpractised eye ; but he knows what yawners some of them must be from the remarks of the bumpkins assembled on the hill. He pictures his horse landing on its head and rolling heavily

on him. He sees himself picked up insensible by a few spectators, carried off on a hurdle to a white farmhouse he sees in the distance; the doctor arrives and pronounces life to be extinct: the news is conveyed to his sorrowing wife and children.

"Ah," says Oldwig to himself, "she will be sorry for what she said to me last night. She can't help her tongue, I suppose. I believe she is as fond of me as ever she was," and a silent tear steals down his cheek.

But there is a movement on the hill; the judge and starter are making preparations to set them going.

Winebold rides up to Mr. Goodbery, who is on the box seat of his drag, and whispers that he would be obliged if he would tell his butler to give him a glass of cherry brandy before he starts, as he feels that, perhaps, on an occasion like this it is as well to tune his nerves with a little tonic before starting.

Winebold rides round to the back of the coach to the butler, who is fumbling about for the cherry brandy in the boot of the vehicle, and slipping a shilling into his hand, requests him to pour the liquor into a tumbler, as "those little glasses only hold a toothful, don't you know."

Loud voices are now enquiring for this delinquent, who quickly rides up to the starter. The question is asked, "Are you ready?" and the answer is given in the affirmative. Both horses bound gaily away as the flag drops to a splendid start.

Away they go merrily down the hill in workmanlike fashion, Winebold slightly leading. The first fence to be encountered has no doubt been judiciously selected by the committee to give the competitors confidence, and it is therefore easily accomplished. Away they sail over a large grass field and pop over a low post and

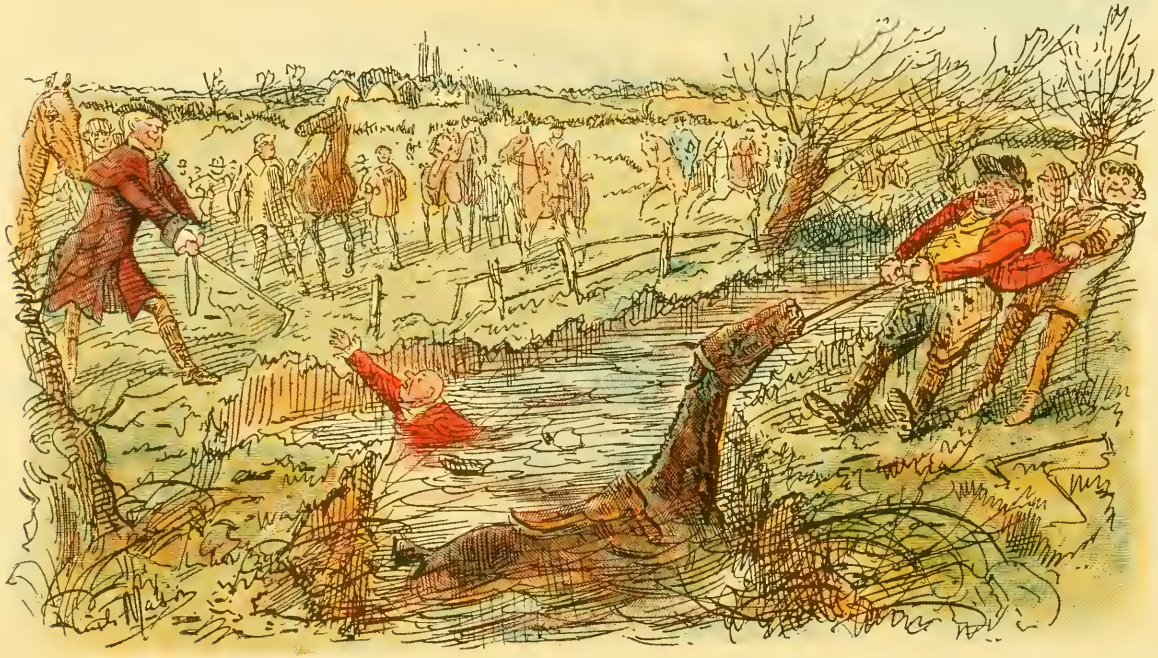
rails, both landing safely on the other side. They now come to some rising ground where a double has to be negotiated with a slight swish fence on the top. Dragoon takes it in his stride, and dropping his hind quarters into the ditch on the far side, he makes a desperate peck and nearly gives his rider a fall, but with wonderful skill Oldwig keeps him on his legs. In the near distance they see frowning a formidable-looking bullfinch. Oldwig glances uneasily at his opponent, and shortly after it is observable that Mr. Winebold returns a similar look.

The question is now who is going to be the bold man to lead over this terrible obstacle ; so far all has gone as merrily as a marriage bell, and they are thoroughly alive to the fact that all their movements are easily discernible by the spectators on the hill. Oldwig rides at it at a slow canter, some might say, with the object of making his horse refuse, which that sagacious animal promptly does, for we are told there is no closer secret than that between a horse and his rider. Sulphur seeing the tactics of the other horse naturally follows suit. The two sportsmen begin to look about for a weak spot, where it may be possible for them to clamber through. But no such luck, for the farmer whose land they are crossing, is in affluent circumstances, and keeps his fences in admirable repair. They are ashamed therefore to dwell longer reconnoitring, and there is nothing for it but to have it. Oldwig again rides at it, but not with sufficient dash or impetus to carry both horse and rider safely over, for Dragoon, jumping in a reluctant and half-hearted manner, makes a blunder on the landing side, and gives his jock a little acrobatic exercise. No damage is sustained, and before his horse can rise Mr. Oldwig has caught him. Winebold lands

nearly on the top of Mr. Oldwig, and is well rated by that worthy for riding in his coat pocket. He is soon mounted and away, and they are both on their headlong career, determined either to die or conquer. Two or three more formidable fences are traversed without further mishap. Fortunately the going is light, and as yet their steeds show no signs of distress; and it is well that such is the case, for they are quickly approaching the bottom where the dreaded Drencher brook runs, and nobody knows better than these two good sportsmen that it means jumping here, if they wish to cover the course. Great excitement is manifested among the spectators on the hill, who are still able to view the horses, although they, unfortunately, are denied a view of the brook at the bottom, and are on the tip-toe of expectation, as they will see the horses when they are rising the fallow field on the opposite bank. Their patience is well tried here, for it is some considerable time before their vision is gratified by the spectacle of the horses. Although Mr. Winebold has taken a small tonic to settle his nerves before starting, yet he feels his heart sinking very low as he approaches the brook, and he longs once more for a randrer of that cherry brandy to set him going again. But, putting his horse's head hard at it, and clapping his spurs well into the sides of old Sulphur, he rides bravely at it. The horse, with a gallant effort, lands on the edge of the steep bank, and, after making a hard fight to recover himself, rolls back into the weedy stream. Mr. Oldwig is riding at the brook a few yards lower down, not daring to look at the result of his opponent's attempt, but his horse, perceiving the trouble of his companion, stops short, and its rider takes a header into the stream.

By this time the rider of Sulphur has managed to scramble up the bank, and, having secured the reins of his horse, is endeavouring to drag him out; meanwhile, Oldwig is puffing and blowing up to his armpits in the stream, and wringing the water out of his eyes and ears, vowing vengeance against his horse. "But no time must be lost," thinks Oldwig. "Winebold will, no doubt, have his horse out in a minute and make the most of his opportunity to steal a march on me." So, clambering up the muddy bank, he regains his horse, which a yokel has fortunately caught, and quickly mounts. His temper is thoroughly roused at Dragoon's scurvy behaviour, and, after waking him up thoroughly with the persuaders, he puts him resolutely at the water, for he well knows the horse he bestrides is one of the finest water-jumpers in the county. Dragoon, now seeing his rider means business, goes at the brook at racing pace, carrying his rider well over with two feet or more to spare; but by this time Winebold is leading three fields ahead, and going in gallant style, in fact he is close to the steeple where half their journey is accomplished. Oldwig is too much of a veteran sportsman to bustle his horse to overtake Sulphur, for he knows that he is not yet home, and he wisely calculates that as he has a horse in front of him, there is little chance of his mount refusing anything else that he may be called upon to negotiate. Furthermore, his blood is warm, and he feels they have got over the worst of the course. He remembers now, with a smack of satisfaction, that on the return journey they will be able to cross a farm bridge, and thus save themselves a second encounter with the Drencher. Standing well up in his stirrups, he pursues the flying Winebold, who is still merrily sailing away, no doubt

under the delusion that he has got it all to himself, and that his opponent will not again be in evidence. Mistaken man! By the time they have reached the farm bridge, Mr. Oldwig, who now feels that he is indeed a better man than he thought he was, is slowly but surely overhauling him. Turning round, at this moment, to make sure of his position, Winebold is surprised to see the close vicinity of his sporting friend. They have now crossed the bridge, and are again in view of the assembled spectators on the hill, Winebold leading about half a field. It is evident that Sulphur is beginning to show signs of great distress, for the last two fences, although not stiff ones, have been got over in a very scrambling fashion. Oldwig having ridden with consummate judgment, and nursed his horse, now draws up almost in a line with Sulphur. How Oldwig now congratulates himself for those early morning gallops which have brought his horse into such a fit state of training. He indeed feels proud that if he is not destined to be the winner, he will not be placed far behind, "for," thinks he, "I am a good deal better than some of the young ones now, and if I win it will stop the old woman's tongue, for she can't say very much to me then, and if she does I will shut her up." They are now within three or four fields of the winning post, and there is only one fence that Oldwig has any doubt about in his mind, a double with a small post and rails on the top; a fence of no magnitude, but still one that requires an intelligent hunter to negotiate it safely. Dragoon and Sulphur are now neck and neck, both about fairly pumped, and becoming careless at their fences. More quickly than I can write they are on the other side both down, and both riders have received imperial crowners. In the



THE BROOK.

hurry and excitement of the moment the jockeys rise in a half dazed manner and grab the first horse that comes to hand. Both horses being dark brown and of the same height, it is not unnatural that in the excitement of the moment Mr. Oldwig should mount Sulphur, while Mr. Winebold mounts his friend's horse. The finish is brilliant; both men sit down well in their saddles and get every ounce out of their horses in the final struggle; but condition will tell, and Dragoon surely but slowly draws away from the other horse, and comes in a winner by about seven or eight lengths. A cheer goes up from the spectators who have witnessed this magnificent finish. The riders, who have hardly recovered from their header, for the first time realise the fact that they have in the scurry exchanged horses. When it becomes known that such is the case, uproarious laughter is indulged in, and a wag suggests that as it can be nothing else than a draw, they should ride the race over again, but this suggestion both our friends strenuously oppose. Bets are all off and the steeplechase, which has no doubt afforded many people much amusement, and a pleasant day's outing, terminates without the loss of money on either side.

Mr. Winebold is then conducted by his friends to many of the carriages, and having drunk them all dry he enters his gig and drives home.

It is currently reported that Mr. Oldwig was not satisfied with the result and wishes to enter again into contest with Sulphur early in the spring; but this report I can authentically deny is incorrect, for I have it from an excellent source that he has come to an arrangement with his wife that she will allow him to hunt, he having passed his word to her that never more will he enter into contest with Mr. Winebold between the flags.

CHAPTER IX.

THE day after the steeplechase Eric, Sir John's son, is up betimes.

Having had a walk to give himself an appetite for breakfast, he lounges into the hunters' room. How well he looks, his well-tanned face and healthy complexion showing clearly that he passes most of his time out of doors.

Breakfast is not yet ready, but preparations have been made for that meal on a long oak cavalier table that stands in the centre of the stone-flagged room. A charming study this room would be for a painter, with its light and cheerful appearance, the long-barrelled sporting guns in the rack over the fireplace, and trophies of the chase, such as deers' heads, foxes' masks and brushes adorning its walls. In the corner hangs a miscellaneous collection of shot-pouches, powder-flasks, fishing-nets, a post-bag, and an implement used for testing hay—all more or less essential to those dwelling in a country house. This room Sir John Jarvis frequents more than any in the house, although it was originally built for the entertainment of sportsmen when returning from hunting or shooting.

Dressed in his hunting clothes, Eric leans against the old oak mantelpiece and falls into a reverie of thought.

He is thinking that his life at college might, perhaps, have been toned down a little, and then he begins to think of the bygone days at Oxford—of tandems driven at high speed; cabriolets, with the smallest of tigers hanging behind; night excursions, when watchmen were assaulted and thrown over in their boxes whilst asleep; door-knockers and bell-handles wrenched off; scouts and dons eluded; statues painted various colours, and many more pranks all incidental to college life.

What days those where when Charley Yaverton was with him at dear old Balliol College. The many river excursions on Isis, or the long, delightful summer afternoons spent in angling. The grey old college walls, musty books and ice-cool ale from the butteries pass before him in a visionary dream, when he is suddenly recalled from his reverie by Miss Betty, who enters the room, neatly attired in riding costume.

"Good morning, Eric, why so solemn this morning?" says his sister; "surely you have not at your time of life anything to give you cause for such harassed looks?"

"No sister," replied the young man, "my thoughts were far from unpleasant. I was thinking over the time at Oxford, where dear old Charley pulled me out of so many scrapes."

Now let it be known to the reader that Charley is an especial favourite of Betty's. On his long-continued visits at Buckskin Hall, it appears he has made good use of his time; it is not to be wondered at that Miss Betty should fall even deeper in love with him than before, after his gallant defence when the coach was attacked by highwaymen. It is noticeable that gentlemen who have posed in the part of a gallant should likewise deem it their duty to devote the remainder of

their life to the tending and watching over of one they have rescued from a great danger.

The talk of the brother and sister is not continued as Sir John and Lady Jarvis make their appearance, and the conversation becomes general. Eric has decided to hunt his beagles this morning, and asks Mr. Goodbery if he will make one of the party and lend him a hand at whipping-in, to which our friend, good sportsman that he is, readily assents, warning him beforehand that he must be good enough to overlook any shortcomings as to pace.

As soon as breakfast is finished the pack are unkennelled and flood out through the doors into the meadow beyond. They spread about and give tongue in a way which shows that they know well by their master's attire that it is a hunting day.

Two or three turnip fields are drawn before the hounds manage to find. Presently, however, a hare is put up and the little pack race away in full view of puss, who quickly outstrips them. Eric calls upon Mr. Goodbery to put it on and keep well up as he wants a trusty henchman to whom he can turn the hounds occasionally.

Our good old friend has traversed two or three fields when his weight and age begin to tell their tale. He is, however, game to the backbone and sticks manfully to his task, although the huntsman is soon a field and a-half in advance of his whip. At this point the hounds again swing round to the right, almost returning into the field across which Mr. Goodbery is struggling. This gives him another chance of getting his wind and for a few more fields he is with the pack, until the pace becomes too severe, when he again tails off and leaves the huntsman in sole charge.

Mr. Goodbery, who has a profound knowledge of the tactics of hare-hunting, gradually ascends some rising ground, knowing well that the fleet little pack will not get far away and in all probability he will see more of the sport from this eminence than he would if he were pursuing them on the lower ground. As soon as he has reached the spot from which he expects to obtain the best view, he sits down and mops his brow. It is wonderful how vividly the fatigue brings home to one's mind, in moments like these, what horses have to go through when carrying a heavy sportsman to hounds.

By the time Goodbery has well recovered his breath and is thinking of again returning to his duties, the hounds are working within easy distance of him, and he can see at a glance that they have chopped the hare in a little spinney. He descends to the now elated pack, and is accosted by Eric, who good-naturedly chaffs him about his want of condition. Goodbery laughingly replies, that "he has no doubt that he is a wee bit out of form, and rather thick in the wind, and on the whole, perhaps, can play a better part, now-adays, with knife and fork than in the capacity of whipper in."

Old Jowles, the huntsman, who cannot resist the temptation of viewing the sport, has walked out to give his opinion of hare-hunting. Not for a moment does he wish to disparage the young master's belongings, but still he looks upon hare-hunting rather as a sport only to be indulged in by schoolboys.

Some of Jowles' remarks are very amusing. Not many days ago whilst hunting, a farmer riding a rough-looking lean horse was unwise enough to choose a moment when the hounds were at a check to call the

huntsman's attention to the beautiful points of his steed, asking at the same time if Jowles did not thoroughly endorse his opinion. The huntsman, perhaps, in less busy moments would have weighed his words more carefully, but his answer was more appropriate than polite, "Get out of the way with that old hair trunk on a stool," he cried, "I aint got no time to talk about horses' points now."

However, Eric well knows him to be a good sportsman, although he does profess to consider hare-hunting a childish amusement. So as Mr. Goodbery does not feel equal to a second run, Jowles is called upon to act as whipper-in. Another hare is soon afoot, and after a good run is killed in the open. The field then considering that they have done enough for that day return to the kennels, where they all avow that they have had the most pleasant day's hare-hunting on record.

After his exertions Mr. Goodbery returns to the house, where he finds Miss Betty and Charley Yaverton apparently deeply interested in one another's conversation. It is wonderful what an amount of information persons in a state of mind similar to that of our young friends, are able to impart to one another. Mr. Goodbery, not wishing to intrude his society upon them, for he well knows that two is company and three is none on these occasions, quietly steals off to the picture-gallery, leaving the young lovers to continue their conversation. Miss Janet is seated at work at her spinning-wheel in a recess in this apartment, and is ruminating again upon Mr. Goodbery's conduct of last night.

She is in a more serious mood this morning than usual, for she has been reading a book of sermons. She is picturing to herself her future life at Foxley Grange and the *rôle* she will have to play there when installed



MR. GOODBERY ENJOYS A RUN WITH THE BEAGLES.

as mistress. She knows that a bachelor who has remained single so long will require a great deal of breaking in. She has been told sad tales of late hours and uproarious meetings after hunting days, and although she has been brought up in a sporting community she has no idea of allowing muddy-booted gentlemen to intrude into her drawing-room at all hours of the day and night.

"I shall have to enlarge the establishment," she soliloquizes, "bachelor fare may perhaps have been well enough for Goodbery all these years, but I will teach him the pleasures of life when he has got a wife to keep house and make things really comfortable for him."

Mr. Goodbery, all unsuspecting, is strolling down the gallery, gold eye-glass in hand, minutely studying the physiognomy of the Jarvis family, long departed, from the time of Charles I. onwards. There are stately dames with their huge white frills and embroidered stomachers, looking very uncomfortable in the position they have been placed by the artist, and frowning cavaliers encased in relentless armour, some with flowing locks, some with close-cropped hair. Two or three bald-headed gentlemen arrayed in old-fashioned hunting attire and mounted on impossible-looking horses, make up the collection of ancient ancestors.

Perhaps Goodbery's attention is more devoted to the study of the female Jarvises than of the sterner sex, for it may be noticed that he lingers before some portraits for a considerable time, and returns to them again. He is startled on coming suddenly upon Miss Janet working noiselessly at her wheel. For a moment he appears confused, and is about to withdraw, but she reassures him with a winning smile, and motions

him to a seat beside her in the window. She slowly, but surely, opens her batteries on this unsuspecting gentleman. Now is the opportunity which may not occur again, and she is determined to avail herself of it. How fortunate that he has found her out. No doubt he has come to proclaim his love; at all events, Miss Janet intends this time to make hay while the sun shines, and to give him that encouragement for which she believes he has up till now been waiting.

"Oh, Mr. Goodbery," she begins, "I am so pleased you have come to have a chat with me. It is so good of you to have found me out. Poor little me, I am so lonely, working here alone," continues the doleful lady; "to meet with a sympathetic soul like you is, indeed, balm to my troubled heart. I fain would talk with you of serious matters." (At these words Mr. Goodbery begins to feel uneasy and rather regrets his visit to the picture gallery.) "Therefore," continues she, "let us speak of matters that are of vital interest to us both. It is no good concealing our feelings, we are not children now, and we can think for ourselves. We have no stern parents to consult; why, therefore, I ask, shall we not let our souls commune together?"

Goodbery fidgets uneasily on his chair, and tries to turn the subject, but the lady has got the bit firmly between her teeth and there is no stopping her.

"Oh, Mr. Goodbery," she continues, "do try to follow me in my train of thought, and like the poet let us sing, 'Oh, that our hearts were one,' for I look upon you as my friend, I may say as my protector, for there is no one else to whom I can look but you. We have known each other from childhood. I know, rash boy that you are, you were indiscreet last night in allowing your feelings to get the better of you and to proclaim

your love to me under the mistletoe, but I forgive you; doubtless your feelings overcame you in the excitement of the moment, for if you have not openly avowed your love to me, I have known it for years."

Mr. Goodbery produces his bandana handkerchief and vigorously mops his streaming forehead. Things are coming to a pretty pass, he does not know what course to pursue; he thinks that under the circumstances, the best thing to do will be to allow the lady to have her say, and trusts that someone will come into the gallery and thus put an end to the unpleasant interview. He furtively watches the door, but alas, there are no signs of anyone approaching to intrude upon this unsought-for privacy.

"But," continues she, "I forgive you, but do not, I beg you, again let the vulgar public gaze upon our happiness. Oh, Goody, I may call you Goody, may I not? Let us reserve such scenes for private life, for then, indeed, we shall be better able to enjoy our felicity. I do not see any reason that our engagement should be a long one, for has not our acquaintance been a life-long courtship?"

But Goodbery is still silent, he does not mean if he can possibly avoid it in any way to acquiesce to this terrible alliance that is being thrust upon him. He makes another gallant effort to change the subject by talking in a rambling way about a frightful accident that befel him in the hunting field when he was thrown from his horse headlong into a muddy stream where, had it not been for the joint efforts of Mr. Oldwig and a farmer, he would doubtless have succumbed.

But Miss Janet is not to be turned from her purpose, she has a determined expression on her countenance which frightens Goodbery.

"Oh, Goody," she continues, "let me hear you say that

my love is requited. I know that you have so long led a secluded life that you are naturally inclined to be retiring in matters like these. You have nothing to fear, your freedom will be as great as ever, and, perchance, should you meet with an accident you would have loving hands to tend you in your illness. Say, then, when shall be the happy day?"

Goodbery thus driven into a corner begins to think what sort of an answer he must make to this terrible virgin. It flashes through his brain that he would not only give his best hunter in his stable to have avoided that fatal kiss, but the whole of his stud and his house thrown in. He then falls to thinking what punishment is adequate to mete out to Oldwig for having incited him to that foolish bit of gallantry, for he now looks upon his friend's action as one of the most hideous offences that could have been perpetrated by any human being. For a moment he contemplates calling that gentleman out to mortal combat,and as the thought matures in his mind it grows stronger. Unfortunately, he cannot shift the burden on to the shoulders of a married man like Oldwig; otherwise he would cunningly have suggested that that poor, unoffending man had been madly in love with Miss Janet for years.

While these thoughts are flashing rapidly through his brain, Miss Janet, who considers she has not, perhaps, sufficiently enlarged upon the occasion wildly throws her arms about our hero's neck. Just at this moment the amorous maid and her unwilling swain are startled by a loud peal of laughter, for Sir John and Charley Yaverton have noiselessly entered the gallery, and have witnessed this poetic embrace. Under the circumstances there is nothing to do but for Good-

bery to disengage himself, and in some way save this lady's good name and his own from idle slander.

In a moment an idea strikes him. He joins heartily in the laugh, and says,

"Sir John, you have spoilt a good thing. Miss Janet and I have been arranging to give the inmates of Buckskin Hall a little surprise in the way of a play; and, as you know, this requires a great deal of practise; but you have unfortunately come upon us during our rehearsal. You will not, however, I trust, mention this matter to the household until we are prepared to give the performance, for, as you know, the only way to make amateur theatricals succeed is to keep the preparations for them a dead secret.

Sir John laughingly answers that he will not disclose their little plot to the others, and Miss Janet, having been discovered in so foolish a position, deems it prudent, under the circumstances, to say nothing for the present, preferring to let matters take their course.

CHAPTER X.

THE week after the events related in the preceding chapter, Mr. Goodbery calls upon Mr. Oldwig, and finds that worthy smoking a pipe and consuming a glass of punch in his comfortable study at Hare Lodge. On entering, Oldwig receives him with his usual cordiality, when the following conversation ensues:

"I have come to see you," says Goodbery, "upon a matter which has caused me the greatest possible worry, and it is entirely owing to you that this terrible misfortune has befallen me."

"You startle me," says Oldwig.

"I allude to the occurrence which, you will remember, happened at Buckskin Hall. You had, doubtless, planned that I should be made a buffoon of that evening, and had, no doubt, counted the misery that I should afterwards endure by perpetrating so dastardly an act as I did on Miss Janet on that occasion."

"My good fellow," replies Oldwig, "what on earth do you mean? You have been openly paying your addresses for the last two years to Miss Janet, and have made conversation for your friends, because you have not avowed your suit for her. And now you come to me and upbraid me for having incited you to kiss your betrothed. This is indeed really too funny; if anything, I am your benefactor, for it appears that I

have now brought things to a pass which they ought to have reached years ago."

"I will let you understand, Sir," says Goodbery, "that there is nothing, nor has there ever been anything between that good lady and myself. As you know, I am a confirmed bachelor, and it is not likely at my time of life that I shall change my views; therefore, this tomfoolery on your part, for I can call it nothing else, is ill-timed. I may mention that since that fatal night I have received no less than half-a-dozen letters from my friends congratulating me on my approaching nuptials, and I therefore come to you, as the cause of this unpleasant affair, to use your best endeavours to at once put an end to it, for, with all due respect to the lady in question, I look upon marriage as nothing more or less than one of the most terrible calamities that can befall a man."

"Goodbery," says Oldwig, "you are an intriguing scoundrel. You have won this dear lady's affections, and now, forsooth, you come to me and try to persuade me against my better feelings to advertise amongst your friends that there is no engagement between you. I should have thought at least that anyone calling himself a gentleman would have had sufficient feeling not to jeopardise the character of a lady who, in good faith, has plighted her hand to him. I consider that your behaviour has been that of a craven and a coward, and, unless you give me your word of honour, which, for that matter, I may tell you now I hold very lightly, that you will marry the lady instantly, I shall feel it my duty as well as my privilege as an old friend of Miss Janet to claim satisfaction from you."

Now Goodbery is not a man of arms, but he dreads the idea of marriage more than the muzzle of a loaded pistol, and therefore thinking that by this

expedient he may perhaps avoid the greater catastrophe, he then and there accepts Mr. Oldwig's challenge and withdraws.

High and low he searches in vain for a trusty henchman who will stand by him in this terrible ordeal through which he has to pass, but it seems that his behaviour has been thoroughly discussed and debated on, and everybody is of the opinion that his conduct has been of the most infamous kind. He is compelled as a last resource to apply to an ex-poacher and a drunken stable-keeper, both villains of the lowest type who, having had their qualms overcome by the offer of a large bribe, at last unwillingly consent to act as his seconds.

At length the fatal day draws near. Everything is ready; the ground is measured; a doctor is in attendance with a box of surgical instruments, lint, and bandages. Oldwig is there, looking pale but confident; his two seconds are Sir John and Mr. Lofty. Both these refuse in any way to recognise our hero. Two duelling pistols, with hair triggers, are soon loaded and distributed by the seconds. The morning air is chill and cold; a white mist blows up, and the seconds declare that the combatants are too far apart to see each other properly.

Goodbery turns round to the ex-poacher and requests him to give him a drink of brandy to steady his hand, as he is in a very weak and nervous condition. Unfortunately the seconder, who should have been provided with a flask, has already drunk the contents himself, thinking that it would not be needed.

The ground is now re-measured; the combatants are in position, and the signal is given to fire. There is a flash and a loud report, and Goodbery still finds himself

standing up—unwounded. As the smoke clears off he looks across at Oldwig, whom he sees lying prostrate on the ground. In a moment he is kneeling by the side of his now-disabled foe, who he finds is shot through the heart. The body is quickly lifted into a coach and driven rapidly away. But matters are not to end here. Sir John walks up to Goodbery, and in a stern manner demands satisfaction from him. "Things cannot rest here," he says, "honour must be vindicated, you have damaged my sister's character, and it is now my turn to have satisfaction from you."

Goodbery, more dead than alive, returns to his position. Pistols are again loaded, and the signal is about to be given to fire, when suddenly our hero throws down his pistol to the ground, for he dare not tempt fate the second time. Falling upon his knees before Sir John, he implores his forgiveness and asks on what conditions he may be reinstated in his good opinion. Sir John is at once amenable to reason, and demands that Goodbery shall marry his sister without loss of time. The whole of the party, the two blackguards included, then bundle into the coach in attendance, and are hastily driven off to a neighbouring church. Here Goodbery, to his surprise, finds Miss Janet arrayed in wedding attire with all the usual paraphernalia of veil and orange blossoms. Goodbery cannot help wondering, too, why she is wearing a pair of top boots.

Too much cowed to attempt further resistance, Goodbery is led up to the altar rails, where a parson with a fiendish expression conducts the marriage ceremony. The wedding over, the bells ring out in horrible discord as though deriding him with his folly. They are in the coach being driven back to Buckskin Hall at racing pace. As they gallop along, Oldwig

suddenly appears at the carriage window with a blanched face and blood streaming from his left breast. He is carrying a huge duck gun which he fires at Goodbery without further warning.

There is a tremendous explosion, and Goodbery awakes and finds that he has been the victim of a dream. Footit, being unable to wake Mr. Goodbery by calling him, has let the boot-jack fall on to the polished oak floor, with the result we know.

Goodbery slowly rises and rubs his eyes, and asks the man-servant what time it is. Having informed his master that it is 7.30, and that he "hopes he has had a good night, as he was sleeping wonderful sound," Mr. Goodbery's servant withdraws.

* * * * *

It is needless to say that Mr. Goodbery is still a bachelor, and will remain so till the day of his death. There has been a wedding at Buckskin Hall, in which Charley Yaverton and Betty took the leading part. Goodbery has been taught a lesson ; he no longer kisses ladies under the mistletoe, for he says that the dream he had will be engraved on his memory to the day of his death. "I have been a hunting man all my life," Goodbery is fond of saying, "but never before have I hunted any animal on the face of the earth as that woman hunted me that night."

THE END.

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